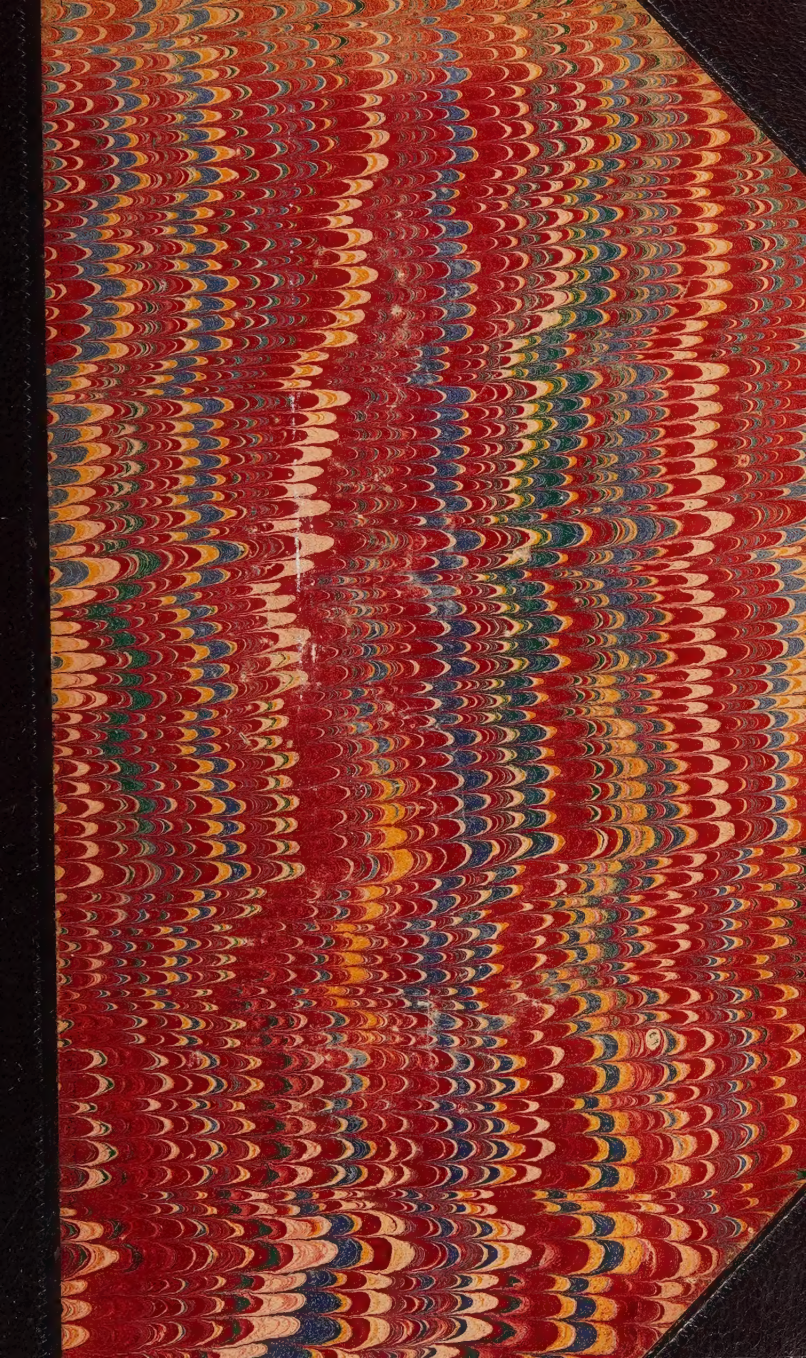

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/trustfortrust00barr_1

TRUST FOR TRUST.

BY A. J. BARROWCLIFFE,

AUTHOR OF "AMBERHILL."

"For every inch of woman in the world,
Ay, every dram of woman's flesh, is false,
If she be."—*Winter's Tale.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

1859.

[*The right of translation is reserved.*]

CONTENTS.

Chap.		Page
I.	The Fever Fit	1
II.	Among the Larches	17
III.	The Old Apple-tree	28
IV.	John Griffiths	37
V.	Saturday Night	45
VI.	Sunday Morning	61
VII.	The Shepherd's Daughter	68
VIII.	Porchester Fair	83
IX.	Devil's Hollow	100
X.	Light on the Waters	107
XI.	The Bend in the Stream	114
XII.	The White Road	120
XIII.	Mr. Hornbeam's Ancestors	148
XIV.	The Seventh Lover	156
XV.	To Porchester	163
XVI.	A Wife's Return	172
XVII.	Betsy's Ghost	180
XVIII.	Bridge Hill	202
XIX.	Sunset	212
XX.	Pleiades	227
XXI.	ζ Ursæ Majoris	247
XXII.	Corona Borealis	256

TRUST FOR TRUST.

CHAPTER I.

THE FEVER FIT.

While Mary took the message from Daniel Hobbes to Lucy, Anthony was riding towards the Chancery House. Mrs. Fraser had let him know that she had something important to communicate. He found her in her luxurious sitting-room, considerably changed both in manner and appearance. She was dressed with all the care of her old courting days. She met him with heightened color, and a certain bashfulness softened her proud beauty. When he spoke she did not check her smiles, as she had been accustomed to do, nor was her tone measured

and indifferent any longer when she answered him. He felt the change, but did not reflect upon it. He was too much interested in other matters. The news she had to tell him was that the purchase of the Bridge Hill property had already been arranged in private, and the price agreed upon, between Mr. Hornbeam and the agent of the spendthrift lord, and that the agreement would be signed in the course of a day or two, unless some vigorous act on Anthony's part prevented this consummation. She made him feel, indeed, that nothing but his own immediate presence in London, where the agent lived, could possibly be successful. If the communication of this intelligence had been part of Mrs. Fraser's own design, she must have been less skilful than most of her sex in the art of pleasing, for the irritation it produced in Anthony's mind was enough to counteract a spell of charms far more dazzling than those she had arrayed herself in that day. But she was now entirely in Owen's hands, and she obeyed implicitly the instructions she had received from

him. He thought of his own plans, not hers. He had contrived to make an abject tool of the London agent; and the negotiations which both Anthony and Mr. Hornbeam supposed themselves to be carrying on privately with the spendthrift lord's representative, were in fact conducted solely by Mr. Williams.

Mrs. Fraser shed tears of shame and mortification when Anthony had left her. He was always polite and had become, in a certain sense, friendly, but she saw that her attempt to fascinate him had been totally wasted. She attributed this to the vexation her news had given him, but in truth it would have been the same under any circumstances. His honor was quite perfect here. In all his visits to Mrs. Fraser the idea of danger to himself had never so much as crossed his mind, and he was justified in his unconscious self-reliance. He had made those visits studiously secret, partly from motives of policy, partly because, not having at first told Mary anything about his former love and disappointment, his vanity rebelled against the thought

of such an explanation as would become necessary if Mrs. Fraser were to be spoken of at all between them.

He rode home wild with anger in the cool March afternoon. The Bank was closed, and the clerk had taken Lucy's note, which Mary had left in the Bank parlor, and laid it on the drawing-room table. He saw, and read it. He did not know that Mary had left it for him to read. He read it with the blind eyes of passionate resentment; in the fever fit of a still unacknowledged malady; and as he read, his scattered doubts suddenly condensed themselves into a fixed and dreadful accusation.

"Where is Mrs. Forrest?" he asked the servant who answered as he rang the bell.

He was told she had been out some time; was gone, the man thought, to Mr. Hathorne's.

"Learn whether that fellow has left town," said Anthony.

"Mr. Hathorne, sir? I know he has, sir; I saw him on the top of the coach half an hour ago," was the footman's answer.

"I go to London to-night," said his master. "Take a place for me by the mail."

When Mary came into the room she found her husband standing on the hearth-rug with Lucy's note in his hand. There were lines of great inward suffering on his face, but he looked stern and cold.

"You have been to Richard Hathorne," he said.

"Yes, dearest. I did not promise not to go."

"You did not. On this occasion you have broken no engagement. You have only disobeyed me and defied me. That is well. Your conscience has enough to answer for, Mary."

"Dear love, I was very sorry to disobey you."

"You mean, Mary, you were sorry my will ran counter to your own; you were sorry that your own infatuated conduct involved the annoyance of my displeasure. This is not the sorrow of a virtuous wife; it is the vexation of a guilty one."

"Indeed, Anthony, you are mistaken and unjust. I know I have been guilty of displeasing

you, but was it right, dearest, to forbid me from visiting my friends at such a time of trouble?"

Anthony struck the table with his hand.

"Yes, shameless girl! It was both right and necessary. The wrong has been in suffering my own confidence, kindness, and affection, to put off that prohibition from month to month and from day to day."

Mary stood thunderstruck.

"Mrs. Forrest!"

She started at the formal words and burst into tears.

"Save your tears till they are drops of penitence. I love you, Mary, and am jealous of your wasted sorrow."

Mary ran to him, but he put her down from his neck and seated her in a chair before him.

"You don't know why I went to Richard Hathorne. You haven't heard me."

"I know excuses are never wanting when faults have unpleasant consequences," he replied.

"I went partly with a message from Daniel Hobbes; for his sake and Lucy's," said Mary, trying to calm herself.

"Of course, of course; reasons enough, and any reason but the true one."

"What can you mean, Anthony? I have made them both very happy. I have no doubt Lucy will marry Mr. Hobbes."

"You are talking nonsense, Mary."

"Indeed, I am telling you the truth. I thought Martin Dove would be her husband, but there is no danger of that now."

"No danger! Good heavens! Can you say this to my face?"

"Why should I not say it?"

"That you don't wish Dove to marry?"

"I should be sorry if Lucy married him."

Anthony was about to utter a hasty exclamation, but, glancing down at the note in his hand, he checked himself.

"You met young Dove at Hathorne's house to-day?"

"No; he wasn't there."

"You expected to meet him, then?"

"He's often there, but I didn't think about him to-day. I went partly to make Richard Hathorne more comfortable before he started."

Anthony flung Lucy's note into the fire. "God help us! Is it both of them?" he exclaimed. Mary looked at him in bewilderment.

"You act simplicity to admiration, Mary!"

"Dearest, I act nothing: why should I?"

"Have you fallen so far, Mary? Can you tell lies without trembling? You look the very marble of innocence; is your heart as calm?"

"Feel it!" she cried. She caught his hand and pressed it to her breast. The heart was palpitating like rippled water, but Mary did not know till she laid his hand there.

"Oh, love!" she cried, starting up. "You've frightened me; I can't help it."

He said, "Hypocrite!" and took away his hand.

"What is it, dearest? what have I done?"

"You shall hear, Mrs. Forrest. You have betrayed your husband's secrets to his enemies ——"

"Never! never!"

"How dare you say it? Do you forget that the first betrayal was an open one?—that, at least, is past denial, Mary."

"Oh! Anthony, I thought that was forgiven so long ago."

"It was forgiven, Mary. To my sorrow I took no warning; a sterner husband would have been a kinder one—kinder both to himself and you. I yielded, and I have lost you by it. You have had your will, and it has ruined us. I doubt you, I distrust you, I fear you are a faithless wife, Mary; I fear you are."

"I a faithless wife! I faithless!" She had drawn back with a sudden start. She spoke the words slowly, her fair head rising higher at every syllable, her eyes opening with an infinite astonishment, the blood first leaving her cheeks in the moment's indignation, then coming back hot and scarlet, for the pity of it, where it had never come for shame. Anthony looked at her, and, for the moment only, he almost felt that he was wrong.

"I could not have said this, Mary ——"

"You ought not to have thought it, Anthony."

"I could neither have said nor thought it on anything but proof unanswerable."

"Proof, Anthony! Is falsehood proved? What do you accuse me of? What have I done?"

"You have made Richard Hathorne your lover. Pray Heaven, he be the only one!"

Mary stood motionless, with her raised head and her wide eyes, and the blush upon her face.

"For shame!" she said.

"You tempt me," he answered, "to repeat your words."

"Must I deny this charge, Anthony?"

"Are you bold enough, Mary?"

"I deny it!—utterly!"

"Then your own mouth condemns you; you have done this, and I know it. What am I to think of you, Mary,—you who can answer in this shameful way?"

"Has Richard Hathorne said this of me, Anthony?"

"No."

"Then you do not and cannot know it. You could not, you dare not, think it. Your wife denies it. Is there anything you can believe rather than your wife, Anthony? Anything in the whole world?"

"You are a woman. You deceive yourself; you flatter yourself that things unseen are undiscernible. Men judge by reason and inference, and don't need the palpable touch of truth to know it by. They know that effects have causes; that where nothing else is possible, nothing else can be true."

"And you think this possible, Anthony! with our years of married life before you: our long love,—our child!"

"Explain it, then," he cried, fiercely; "give me facts instead of sentiment. If Hathorne is not your lover, what is he, that you should have done these things?"

"What things can I have done? A charge like this! oh, husband!"

"Trifler! I know more than you imagine.

Day by day as my secrets have been betrayed ——"

"I never told them; I never told them, except that first, only time."

"Silence! Mrs. Forrest, till I have spoken. Day by day secrets, which only yourself could have disclosed to him, have been told to Richard Hathorne. Every attempt to break off your intercourse has failed at your solicitation. When at last my definite command is laid upon you, you break it in my face, rather than let that bankrupt both in estate and character leave the town without some guilty consolation. No more denials, Mary; they serve you nothing. Give some better answer, or be silent."

Mary sat silent. She felt nearly stunned. He continued in a stern but sorrowful voice:—

"I shall be just to you. I charge you with folly and infatuation, but not yet with crime. Hathorne is gone. You have a right to ask that he shall be heard. He shall be heard. Till he returns, no further steps shall be taken. Had it been possible, this charge against you should

have been delayed. But I myself am called to London by affairs of the last importance—an importance which your own breach of trust has given to them; I go immediately; I shall be away three days. Though Hathorne is gone, I dare not leave you without a warning. Respect yourself; control yourself: take care, Mary, take care!"

"Three days! Three days away! Three days with such a charge against me and without seeing you? Who has done this, Anthony? Who accuses me?"

"The facts, Mary; and your husband."

"My husband!" She pushed her hair away as if it hurt her. "I know of no facts; I can think of none; I am stupified, Anthony."

"You gain nothing by this show of ignorance, Mary. You had better be silent. To the last moment I shall believe and pray that your faults have been follies only; nothing worse—nothing worse than that, Mary. Reserve whatever you may wish to say: to hear it in Hathorne's absence would be just to neither of you."

She looked vacantly about the room; pressing her own hands upon her bosom.

"I have no time to say more, Mary; nor is it necessary. Use your time worthily; you will have three days alone."

He went to the door. Mary did not move. He turned and looked at her. It was a look of love, pity, sorrow. It almost beckoned her to his arms. But Mary's brain was reeling at that moment. Her eyes saw nothing. He left the room to make some needful arrangements with his partner, and to prepare himself before the horn of the mail-coach sounded in the Market Place. Mary's giddiness passed over. She saw that he had left her. She ran up-stairs and packed his carpet bag with her own trembling hands, and brought it down to the drawing-room. Soon afterwards she heard his footsteps.

"It's here, dearest; it's ready," she cried, from the open door. She could hear him stop, without replying, and go down to the Bank again. When the horn blew he came quickly into the room. She held out the bag to him and offered wine,

which he drank mechanically. She caught his arm.

"Husband! can you leave me with this accusation over me—with this fearful wrong?"

"I leave you with this warning, Mary, lest a worse thing befall you."

"Can you go at all? Is it possible?"

"I have little choice, Mary. You yourself have forced this journey upon me. Learn from it, however, that I have still some remaining confidence in you; that I do not yet think you have fallen hopelessly; that I believe you will stop short; that I still leave my honor in your keeping."

The horn sounded again, and he turned, but she still clung to him.

"Anthony! husband! kiss me! kiss me before you go!"

He seemed to hesitate, but he stooped and kissed her.

"You shall have justice, Mary. If you are wronged, you shall have vengeance. Would to God I could believe you were!"

She did not follow him down-stairs. She feared lest she might faint upon the door-step.

The horn sounded once more; the wheels rattled over the stones. Mary turned from the window, sat down at a little table, and by a great effort controlled her hand so that she was able to write. She wrote to her father, among the mountains. Her letter was very short.—"Come to me," she said; "I am wretched; come to me. My husband thinks I am untrue to him. Come to me."

CHAPTER II.

AMONG THE LARCHES.

On the following morning Owen Williams called upon Mary. She had passed a strange and terrible night—a night in which some awful curtain seemed to have risen before her eyes, disclosing a world she never dreamt of, where horror reigned instead of love and beauty, and where the dread pathway running through the midst seemed the very one she herself was treading. Her husband's conduct was perfectly incomprehensible to her. She was unconscious of ever having repeated her first fault in regard to any of his secrets; she knew her attachment to the Hathornes had irritated him, but how it could become the basis of such a charge against herself seemed altogether past finding out. Could she ever have doubted

Anthony? Could anything have made her think him false to her? He was her husband and he loved her. Her trust in him was stronger than in her own senses. A virgin flame, an undying lamp, she would take it to the grave with her and rise with the light still burning. Thank God, even this charge against her had made no difference, though it came from his own lips, which never should have spoken it. He was deceived, he was much abused, some cruel enemy or some strange, unhappy circumstance had done him this grievous wrong. But truth would show itself. The Lord, who cared for everything, and for true love most of all, would put them right again. It might make a life-long change; he might not feel the same to her after he once had doubted her: perhaps in this world he would never love her so well again; but he would hereafter. So she lay thinking and weeping. She did not blame him; she felt as if some cruel thing had seized him, and that it was he who needed help and deliverance. She must wait for his return, and Richard Hathorne's. When

Hathorne came, this shameful charge would be fully answered, whatever might be its origin. Her husband must have had some cause to doubt her, some great, inexplicable cause. What made him sure she had betrayed his secrets? She could not recollect that he had told her. Perhaps some one else had been betraying him and laying the charge to her. That seemed a mean suspicion. Why should she suspect anyone? Who was there wicked enough to harm her in this frightful way? She would wait, and meanwhile her father would be coming. He would not tarry when he heard the cry of his child.

So when Williams called upon her, she would not deny herself to him. She was doing her utmost to be patient till Anthony's return, and, in the meantime, to appear as usual in the eyes of others. Owen, however, who, without knowing what had happened, had reason, nevertheless, to think it likely that Mr. Forrest would have had a quarrel with his wife before he left home on his hasty and irritating errand, perceived that something of the kind had taken place, and

by a few well-devised questions, soon satisfied himself sufficiently as to the general state of affairs.

"I am going to build a cottage on Chosen Forest," said he, "no great way from the Chancery House. I mean it for a speculation, to let as summer lodgings for children and ladies. I'm not a family man, and have my doubts about the situation, and I want to get a lady's advice. If you could make it convenient to drive over there, the roads are getting very pleasant, and I should be indebted to you, madam."

Mary would have been glad to go almost anywhere. She said she would take a drive with Tony, and meet Mr. Williams on the forest in two or three hours if he liked. He declared himself under great obligation to her, and arranged to meet her at the foot of one of the steep ascents. Mary had an open phaeton, which the gardener, who was also her coachman, drove. She took the child and his nursemaid with her. The day was very bright—the banks were already covered with early flowers, and

lambs were in the fields. Mary cared more for the young lambs than for any other of the signs of spring. They were her peculiar friends; her native playfellows. Many a rocky knoll, many a dark green hollow, dripping waterfalls, dewy slopes, and pastures high up among the mountain mists, came round about her, by a life-long association, with the snowy fleeces and the bleating. When the child sat still and there was nothing said, those memories seemed to snatch her in their arms and take her home again; the little heights of Chosen Forest stretched into majestic ones; the cropping rocks grew into threatening precipices; and she felt as though, if she were to call across the hills, the voice that answered would be her father's.

Owen met them at the appointed place. They got out there, to walk up to the site of his intended cottage.

"Do you know the old Chancery House?" he asked. "It's worth looking at. There's a footpath down to it. Your man might drive round and meet us in the road."

Mary had never seen the Chancery House, as Williams knew very well. She agreed to his arrangements. They walked up the hill, and, having discussed the question of the cottage, descended by the path he spoke of. It led into that road among the larches out of which was the short private way leading to Mrs. Fraser's door. In the present stage of his development, Master Tony's great gift was the gift of mischief, and when he went with his mamma the usual object of her solicitude was by some means to bring him home again safe and sound. This day, however, the child was soft and tractable much beyond his wont. He kept looking at short intervals in his mother's eyes with an unconscious tenderness, as if his little heart were troubled by her unknown trouble. He kissed her hand many times during their drive; and always kissed it if she turned and smiled at him. When they left the carriage he slipped from his nurse's side and went to Mary's, walking with her, holding by her dress, and either prattling in a subdued voice or keeping silence.

Owen had looked at him several times as if it would not have been disagreeable to him to take the little fellow by the neck and pitch him over the nearest wall; but he had said nothing about the child hitherto. As they approached the private path he slackened his pace and looked down again at Master Tony.

"There's a squirrel in that tree," said he, pointing to an overhanging beech a good way in advance. The effect was immediate. The child ran forward as fast as he could run, followed by Betsy, to find the squirrel. Owen and Mary walked slowly after them.

"A queer lady lodges at the Chancery House," said Williams. "I suppose you haven't heard of her?"

"Not that I remember."

"Very handsome and rather young. Rich too, and a widow."

"Why does she choose this out-of-the-way place?"

"I suppose she knows best, madam. This is her private path; very private, as you see:

leads up to her door. If we go a few steps down it, we shall see the Chancery House."

Tony and his nurse were busy under the beech tree, so Mary went with Williams down the private path.

"The lady has a friend," said Owen, looking downwards; and he pointed out the prints of a horse's hoofs in the turf.

"What a lonely place," Mary exclaimed, when, at the end of the path, they came to the opening among the trees, with Mrs. Fraser's end of the Chancery House in front of them.

"Convenient for a private interview," said Williams. Some one was watching at one of the windows, and in a second or two Mrs. Fraser opened the door. Mary recognised her, with astonishment.

"Oh!" she cried, starting suddenly.

"Do you know Mrs. Fraser?" Owen asked, with a quick glance of alarm.

"I have known her, though not her name," Mary replied.

Now there was very little that Mrs. Fraser

had to tell which Owen Williams had not wormed out of her, but she had never told him of her visit to John Griffiths' cottage, the night after Mary's engagement; and as on that occasion Williams had only seen her at a distance, he was not aware that she had ever been to the Welsh village, or that Mary had ever met her. This sudden recognition disconcerted him. He had arranged everything beforehand with Mrs. Fraser. It was by his desire that she opened the door when he and Mary made their appearance. She had objected at first to show herself to Mary, but had given no reason, and afterwards acquiesced in his plan. His intention, however, had been to let Mary see her as a stranger, and by no means included the possible explanation of former acquaintance. But he was seldom at a loss in an emergency. He stepped behind Mary, and by a decided gesture commanded Mrs. Fraser to go back again. She went back and closed the door. "We are trespassers," he said to Mary. "The lady expects her visitor, it seems, and is disappointed. She should have

waited till his horse appeared. A fine old house, madam, if the most were made of it."

"Yes," said Mary. She was thinking how strange it was that this should be the lodger at the Chancery House. Williams said no more about her. He thought it safest to make further inquiries beforehand. As they walked on, he pointed out the peculiarities of the rocks and the wild character of the scenery. "Mr. Forrest has some property up this way, I fancy," said he, when they came in sight of the carriage. Mary did not know that he had, but she understood he had business of some kind—Bank business she thought, somewhere over the hills.

"I thought so," said Williams, "because I often meet him about here." This was a lie, for Owen took special care never to meet Anthony in that neighbourhood. It conveyed the truth, however, and Mr. Williams was not particular about forms of speech. Mary heard, but took no notice. She had far other thoughts about her husband. She shook hands with Owen,

received a repetition of his thanks, and drove home again; Tony prattling of how he had looked and looked for the squirrel, and how the squirrel hid himself in the sky.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD APPLE-TREE.

Williams, after he had watched the carriage out of sight, and even climbed a piece of rock by the road side, that he might see it for a minute longer, returned sullenly to the private door of the Chancery House.

"Now, Mrs. Fraser, you have been deceiving me."

"How have I deceived you?"

"You and Mary Griffiths have known one another before."

"She never heard my name."

"There's no use in fencing with me. I must have perfect candor or this affair stops here. I'm not going to risk my character and my

political aims for any woman's romance. It suits my purpose to bring you and Mr. Forrest together; to open his eyes to his wife's conduct, and to give you a lawful chance of taking her place; but I do this for my own ends, not yours: and if you are going to conceal things from me, you'd better say so and have done with it."

"I had no idea it was any consequence," Mrs. Fraser answered, feeling rather frightened. "You know I objected to your bringing her here. What use could it be?"

"That's no business of yours, ma'am. A critical moment has arrived. The proofs I have to establish are of the most circuitous kind. The business is difficult and disagreeable, and the less you know about it the better. The process must be left entirely in my hands. Have my promises ever failed? If they have not, you have no reason to trouble yourself as to the result in the present case: but I require exact obedience and entire confidence. How did she come to know you? I must have the whole story."

He had gained an absolute authority over the unhappy woman, and knew precisely how to deal with her. She told him at once every particular about her visit to the mountain village, the night she spent there, and what took place between herself and Mary.

When Owen heard how Mary possessed a knowledge of Mrs. Fraser's history without the slightest notion that her husband was concerned in it, he smiled darkly with compressed lips, and seemed well satisfied.

"Has she kept the secret?" he said, doubtfully.

"Yes," Mrs. Fraser answered. "I have put questions to Mr. Forrest which he must have answered differently if she had ever told him."

Owen thought for a moment of what he had himself observed, and came to the same conclusion. He was so well pleased with this that he left Mrs. Fraser without any remaining traces of displeasure in his manner, telling her that the difficulties before them would be reduced and the time shortened by what he had heard.

Mr. Williams returned to Porchester, called at the Four All's on his way, and had a private interview with Fowkes. This interview was rather a long one. The result of it was that Mr. Fowkes buttoned one of his pockets with an air of possession and prosperity, and that Owen went home and wrote a letter, which he dated the following day. In the course of the evening Mr. Fowkes disguised himself with so much success that his wife, finding him in the bar, spoke quite civilly to him, believing him to be a stranger. He did not undeceive his better half, but walked away, chuckling with satisfaction. He walked straight to the Bank, rang at the private door, and inquired for Mr. Richard Hathorne. The servant informed him that Mr. Hathorne was not there, and had left the town, he believed; whereupon Mr. Fowkes winked, and went his way. In an hour or so he returned, making the same inquiry; and the same answer being impatiently repeated, he gave the servant to understand, in a symbolic way, that he was an agent of the law, and the bearer of a writ

against the aforesaid bankrupt; that he had good reason to guess he was hiding there, and that he had to request that his inquiry might be carried up to Mrs. Forrest. Mary, sitting alone with her sad thoughts, was startled by the question, and not more startled than annoyed. She returned an indignant answer and told the servant to send the man away, whereupon Mr. Fowkes winked again and departed. He disposed of himself till after midnight, and about two o'clock in the morning he might have been seen crossing the meadow behind the Borough Wall, had any one been watching there. The servants at the Bank slept as usual that night, though the footman remembered afterwards that he had a dream of breaking a decanter. When they woke, however, and drew up the blinds of the house, there was a commotion.

The window of the breakfast-room looked into the garden behind, and under it there was a conservatory against the wall. Near the corner of the conservatory was the well-known old apple-tree. The door leading from the house into the

garden was a strong one. It was locked every night at eleven o'clock by the Bank clerk, who slept on the premises and kept the key, and all the lower windows on the garden side were guarded by strong iron stanchions. Now the position of matters was such that no one could have effected an entrance into the house by means of the conservatory roof and the breakfast-room window over it without the help of a ladder; but, for the contrary process, anyone already in the breakfast-room would find no great difficulty in making an exit that way, dropping first on to the end wall of the conservatory, thence into the apple-tree, and so to the ground. Up to eleven o'clock, therefore, it was possible for the inmates of the house to admit a visitor by the garden door, and after that door was finally closed, to let him out again in the way described. The garden, however, was surrounded by a high wall, and the only other door in it was the one leading to the private path between it and the Borough Wall meadow. This door was also locked every night and the key brought to Mr. Forrest, or, in

his absence, to Mary. It was locked at dusk by the gardener.

When the servants, on Friday morning, drew up the blinds and looked into the garden, there was, as has been said, a commotion. Two or three squares of glass in the conservatory roof were broken, nearly under the breakfast-room window. A large bough of the old apple-tree was broken also. There were the prints of a man's feet, going from the house, on one of the borders, and the door opening on the private path to the meadow was unlocked and ajar. Clearly some one had been in the house that night, and had escaped in this way.

Mary was soon roused and told what had been discovered. She at once concluded it to be the work of thieves, and ordered the Bank clerk to be called, but she was filled with consternation on very different grounds when, after a short period of bustle and excitement, the two facts, that nothing within doors had been disturbed, and that the fugitive who had escaped by the window must have been in the house before the garden door was

locked, that is, before eleven o'clock the previous night, were gradually developed and dwelt upon by the servants. She soon saw that they were connecting these facts with the mysterious inquiry for Richard Hathorne, and that they already half believed she had been hiding him. Their belief was very innocent. Indeed it rather raised her in their estimation. No dishonorable thoughts had entered their minds. They knew her friendship for Lucy, supposed that Hathorne was pursued by the law, and found it very natural that he should seek refuge under Mary's roof. But to Mary herself, under her present circumstances, the idea seemed utterly ruinous. What would Anthony think when he heard that during her husband's absence his wife had been concealing in her own house her reputed lover? She was nearly beside herself with terror. She ran to find the key of the door which had been left ajar, and felt a momentary relief when she saw it in its usual place. But, alas! that helped but little. There had been ample time for her to unlock that door and leave it open, if she pleased, between dusk

and eleven o'clock. Resolved to clear up the mystery before Anthony's return, she ordered information to be given to the police, and the most rigid search to be made for the imaginary burglar. Her efforts only made matters worse, because nothing was discovered. Mary, wretched and despairing, saw Saturday night approach without a single fact having come to light in justification of herself, and for the first time in her life she thought with almost unmixed fear of Anthony's return.

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN GRIFFITHS.

If, since the period of Mary's marriage, no mention has been made of the parents she left behind her in her native valley, the omission must be understood to imply only that they had hitherto taken no important part in the events which it has been the business of this chronicle to deal with. Mrs. Griffiths was an affectionate mother to the end of her days; and as for John himself, his love for his only daughter was of that kind of which the height and depth are known only to God and the recording angels. Once every year, either when young lambs were white on the mountain side, or when the rocky stream and the wild pass were full of flocks and shepherds, at their shearing time,

or when the late hay harvest in the valley was gathered, a little while before the corn, Mary had gone regularly to spend a few weeks at the village in Wales. Her husband had always taken her and brought her home, passing some days with her at her father's cottage at the beginning and the end of each annual visit. Since Tony's birth, the child had of course gone with her, and had been carried by John Griffiths to many a pleasant seat and play-place among the fields. Mary's love for her husband owed at least some portion of its tenderness to the manner in which he had treated her parents from the very day of their engagement. His vanity on some points was boundless, but he had no petty pride and no false shame about him. Having chosen Mary, he accepted honorably the whole conditions of such a union, and behaved towards the humble shepherd and his wife with as much respect and delicacy as he showed to his own father and mother. He was accustomed to wealth, and liked whatever was handsomest in dress, furniture, and state,

but the active interests of life were the things he cared about, and as one, who by choice will hang rich frames upon his walls, can yet enjoy his pictures as well without them, so it mattered nothing to Anthony whether he exercised his thoughts lying on his own damask sofa, or in the wooden chair at John Griffiths' fireside. Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths had been twice to Porchester; once when the child was born, and once afterwards when Mary was dangerously ill. Mary was nursed by her own mother on both these occasions; and in his own house and among the most aristocratic of his friends, Anthony had given and exacted the most scrupulous attention to his wife's parents. He was much attached to John Griffiths, and enjoyed his simple and unworldly conversation. As to good Mrs. Griffiths, she had at first a great ambition to go to Porchester and sit down among Mary's fine friends. Her first visit put an end to that ambition, however. Everybody was kind, but she felt uncomfortable. She discovered that town air did not suit her, and that people's ways

were new-fangled. She never confessed to any disappointment, but she did not go again till Mary's illness caused her to be sent for. Then, indeed, there was neither delay nor hesitation. The news came when the valley was deep in snow, but within three hours afterwards Mrs. Griffiths had walked behind her husband five miles over the wintry mountains, to meet the mail-coach for England. Her careful nursing perhaps saved her daughter, though at the sacrifice of her own future activity. The fatigue of that mountain walk and the chill of the long ride afterwards brought on a disease, which, after she had struggled against it till Mary had recovered, seized her with great severity as soon as she returned home, and at last depriving her of the use of her feet, and threatening her life from time to time, had brought her to the state of a confirmed and sometimes a bed-ridden invalid. She was in the latter case when Mary's letter, written after Anthony had gone to London, was put into the shepherd's hands. The post was long in reaching that mountain village. It

was Saturday morning. John's grief was almost exceeded by his astonishment. His Mary false! His Mary faithless! The Lord bless her, and the Lord's will be done. He was obliged to tell his sick wife what had happened. He read the short letter to her, and they kissed each other with wet cheeks, she lying helpless in her bed, he bending over it. She did not ask if he was going, but she said, "I 'd bid thee carry me, John, if thou wert younger. Don't take the mountain. There 'll be time enough round by the pass to-day." So John took his hat and staff and a small wallet, and went to meet the mail again, and was an hour too soon.

John Griffiths was never otherwise than cheerful. What the feelings of noisy mirth might be he had never known, but to his shepherd's eye the heavens were always open and the dove descending, and whatever storms might be sweeping round him it was not clouds but rainbows that floated by. He lived in a spot of light, with a soft voice sounding through it, and if at times the light itself became an impenetrable

veil, and the ways of God, though never dark to him, were all invisible, he only felt with his child-like hand for the great Guiding one, and found it always at his side. Perhaps he had never felt for it more tremulously than when, having reached the coach road, he sat down on a low stone-wall to wait till the mail should turn the sharp corner under a pyramid of rocks. A bold green mountain rose before him, the March sunshine half turning the green to gold, and masses of floating mist trailed their shadows over it now and then, as the wind blew them towards the summit. John looked at the golden mountain and the shadows, and thought of holiness and sin; thought how the best and brightest, all save One, could boast only of an imperfect glory; how shadow followed shadow till by turns every bright spot was darkened, and yet how there still remained the golden mountain and the sunshine. Then he thought of Mary, tearfully and tenderly. In her short, hasty letter she had only told him what was charged against her. She had not denied the charge. Could he wish

she had denied it? No; she was purer than the snow. Yet his child was mortal, and her husband too just a man to blame her without cause. Had her father been too proud? Had he made his boast too boldly? Could it be the Lord's will to humble him before he died? John Griffiths thought of his village neighbours; of the households which had grown up round him since his Mary was born; of the wide-spread sin, the common shame, the weakness and the folly, till as one by one the faces he had known from babyhood to girlhood passed before him, it seemed as if, even in that mountain valley, his own daughter had been the only one who, with her maiden innocence in her own hands, might have been trusted surely.

John had never looked more grave and tearful than he did now, sitting by the wayside, thinking. His eyes were still raised and looking towards the mountain, but his head from time to time moved sorrowfully from side to side, for the sunshine seemed to grow colder and the shadows heavier. Then a lark sang over his head and a

lamb bleated. He smiled at the happy sounds and raised his eyes still higher till they saw nothing but the sky.

"The Lord knows all," he said. "I 'll not doubt her. I 'm coming, Mary; I 'm coming."

The rest of that day and all night long he was riding towards her. The constellations twinkled over him, and he felt their sympathy. He watched the falling stars with a peculiar smile. His fancy had made them, hitherto, the little birds of Paradise flying from bower to bower in the celestial groves; now, they were like his Mary, running towards him, hiding in her father's arms. The next morning, about nine o'clock, he was in Porchester. The coach stopped at the hotel in the Market Place. John Griffiths got down and walked at once to the Bank door, stopping for nothing, except to pick up a little child who ran, and fell, and was crying, and to say in a cheerful voice, "Never thee mind."

CHAPTER V.

SATURDAY NIGHT.

Anthony had returned from London on Saturday evening. Mary spent the last two days of his absence in utter loneliness of spirit and with feelings of blank dismay. She did not dare to call upon Lucy. Lucy came herself, however, to tell how she was really engaged to Mr. Hobbes; how she was so happy about everything except her brother's misfortunes; how Mr. Hobbes had broken it to Martin Dove himself; how Martin had immediately afterwards made Mr. Hobbes a present of a pair of snuffers and a clothes-brush; and how she should have been wretched to think the poor boy was hurt, but that she knew he cared for nothing half so much as his books, and he would have all the more time for them

if he remained a bachelor. After hearing these things Mary cut Lucy's visit short on a plea of business, and told her she must not expect to see her for the present. Lucy had heard of the supposed attempt upon the Bank, and was both curious and sympathizing, but Mary had nothing new to tell her, and did not dare to mention Richard Hathorne's name in connection with that subject. She ascertained, however, that Lucy had heard no more about her brother's movements, and did not expect to hear for a week at least, perhaps not till he came home; his journey being a long one, and his destination, when he got to France, dependent upon circumstances. There was nothing comfortable in such intelligence at such a time.

Anthony's journey to London had been unsatisfactory in the extreme. He had seen the agent about the Bridge Hill property, but could get nothing out of him except that he would reconsider Mr. Forrest's proposals, and would not absolutely close with Mr. Hornbeam for at least a week or two. The man was a mere puppet in

Owen Williams' hands, and received, no doubt, a handsome consideration for his services, but of course nobody knew anything about it except themselves. On Saturday morning, just before he left town, Anthony received a letter from Williams. It was chiefly about banking business, but near the end of it he had found occasion to write as follows:—

"I am afraid Richard Hathorne is playing false with his creditors. Instead of going straight to France, he came back privately last night, and lodged at the Four All's. Fowkes tells me he was out half the night, and thinks he even tried to see you at the Bank, not knowing you were away. Perhaps he flatters himself he could procure your help again, but I think it is a bad business. His friends know nothing of this visit, and I suppose he expected Fowkes to keep it secret; but the old rascal thought I was a creditor, and told me about it to curry favor. Hathorne left again early in the morning, and seems to have really gone to France at last. He ought to be well looked after. I had the pleasure of meeting

Mrs. Forrest on the hills on Wednesday. She seemed remarkably well."

During his absence from home Anthony's feelings towards his wife had been undergoing a favourable change. Mary's defiance of his command; her apparent determination to meet Hathorne at all risk; the accumulating proofs of her treachery in regard to his secrets (for since the breaking up of the Club there was no one else on whom his suspicion fell), the long chain of previous circumstances; Lucy's little note; and the state of irritation in which he had left the Chancery House; all these things together working upon the jealous doubts already in his mind produced indeed, the momentary conviction that Mary's heart, at least, had been stolen from him, and brought about that outburst of angry accusation which preceded his departure. But he had scarcely left her before he accused himself of haste and cruelty. The happy years they had passed together upbraided him; the daily proofs of her affection pleaded with him; the idea that her simplicity was all deceit and

wickedness seemed quite incredible, when he thought about it, and he was coming home resolved to accept any other solution of the difficulty, when Owen's letter came into his hands.

The soul of a jealous man is like the pebble whirled round a slinger's head. Swift and impetuous, it flies off at last at some unknown tangent to the circle, but whether to the right hand or the left depends on a hair's-breadth difference in the slipping of the thong. This letter made that difference. It stopped Anthony's thoughts in the happy course they were about to rush upon, and shot them in hot haste along the more fatal way. Hathorne back again in his absence! Coming in secret—stealing to the Bank; out half the night, and then away again! If all this could be true, Mary's husband was a fool, and worse than a fool. Explain it? No! he had explained too much already. He had been cheating his own judgment, throwing dust in his own eyes, putting the tainted thing in rosewater, to vow it smelt sweetly. Was he altogether an ass? When his suspicions explained everything with

such accursed clearness, what made him think of choosing any other theory rather than the natural one? Was he to expect exemption from the griefs of husbands? Was he the first who had been cheated for years, by the seeming innocence of a faithless woman? She should have justice; he had promised that she should have justice. Even now, with the truth before him, he would judge nothing, decide nothing, form no opinion; be calm, judicial, patient. Yes! she should have justice, neither less nor more. But oh, my wife! Oh, Mary!

He had had no sleep since he left her. He was feverish and ill; but he checked his thoughts with a strong hand, and got into the coach; he loved her truly, with an upright, honorable love. It was the best part of his whole nature that he had given to her, and to think her false even at this moment was inwardly to die despairing.

It was Saturday night when he arrived again in Porchester. He got down from the coach, looking very haggard, and sent his carpet-bag,

not home, but to his mother's. He himself took a different direction; he went straight to the Four All's. Fowkes expected him, though he did not say so; he took him into the little back parlor, where a candle was burning, and shut the door.

"Mr. Fowkes," said Anthony, "we are not friends, and I have no favor to ask of you. But I am a magistrate, and I require you to answer certain questions."

Fowkes intimated his desire to obey the magisterial command.

"Have you seen Mr. Richard Hathorne here since Wednesday?"

"I should say so," replied the landlord.

"Was he here on Thursday night?"

Fowkes nodded.

"Tell me at what hour he came; when he left, and what you know about his proceedings?"

"Came at nine o'clock; muffled up, you see; on the sly. Didn't say a word—went up-stairs—knows the house, you see. Rang for brandy-

and-water—went out again—came back at three o'clock—off again for the coach at five."

"He went out, you say. Now, Mr. Fowkes, do you know where he went to?" Anthony spoke hoarsely.

"Well, I should say so," replied the landlord.

"Well, sir, go on."

"Thought it was queer," said Fowkes, "so I just followed him. Saw him go round by the Borough Wall; didn't watch him any further."

"And what induced you to lose sight of him, sir, when you saw him at the Borough Wall?"

"Well, Mr. Forrest, I thought, to be sure, he'd got private business at the Bank, and it was all right, you see. Know'd you'd set him up before; didn't know but what you might do it again: wasn't my business, anyhow."

"You are ready to state all this on your oath, Mr. Fowkes?"

"No, I'm not," said the landlord, stoutly.

"How, sir! What do you mean?"

"If you want it sworn, sir, I suppose you're going to take the law of him, somehow, and I'll

not come up against him, if that's it," said Fowkes. "He's not one of your side, Mr. Forrest, or I'd swear fast enough; d—d if I wouldn't."

"How dare you trifle with me, Fowkes? I can compel you to swear."

The landlord whistled.

"Please yourself, Mr. Forrest, but if you pull me up, I can just swear I don't know it was Hathorne at all. Can't say I saw his face, all the time. Might be a thief for anything I know."

"You old rascal!" Anthony began, but he checked himself.

"I've just told you, private-like, and that's all about it," said Fowkes. "I should say I'd better have held my tongue."

Mr. Fowkes' objection to an oath on this occasion had secret reference to the pains and penalties of perjury, and the possible consequences of Mr. Hathorne's bodily return; but Anthony, absorbed in his own bitterness, and, indeed, without any good reason to doubt what he heard, perceived in it only the natural result of the

landlord's feelings as a political partizan. He left the Four All's with the full belief that the statements in Owen's letter were accurate, and that Hathorne had really been in Porchester on Thursday night. He went next to Williams' house, but Mr. Williams had found business or pleasure in a neighbouring town, and was from home for a couple of days.

"No matter," Anthony thought: "what could he tell me? After all, Hathorne may have spent fifty nights at the Borough Wall, but who says he saw Mary?"

Taking a sudden hope out of this reflection, he went to his own door. It was nearly ten o'clock. Mary was expecting him by the latest coach, as he had not made his appearance sooner. The footman opened the door.

"Has Mr. Hathorne been here while I have been away?" Anthony asked, as he entered.

"Mr. Hathorne, sir? No, sir: that is, not that I know of, sir."

"Was there anybody at all here on Thursday night?"

"Well, sir, there was somebody got out by the breakfast-room, but I can't say who it was, sir; missis thinks it was thieves, but we can't make it out, sir."

"Got out by the breakfast room!" cried Anthony, aghast and turning deadly pale. The man immediately related what has been already told. Anthony listened in silent horror. It seemed the final link in the long chain of proofs, and the remnants of his faith in Mary dropped from him on the spot. He grew very calm. It is doubt that makes men tremble. He saw his wife coming down the stairs.

"I sleep to-night at my mother's," he said, loud enough for her to hear. "I have sent on my carpet bag." He had done this before on a few occasions since old Mr. Forrest's death, when his mother had a fit of nervousness or private papers had to be examined, so it excited no attention among the servants. But Mary could only wait for him on the stairs without speaking, and when they reached the drawing-room together she stood before him trembling and pale.

"She can look well when I am absent, ill only when I return," he thought in his inward fever. The whole madness of jealousy was upon him now and he was smitten blind. He sat down in the chair she offered.

"Is the child well?" he said.

"So well, dearest; and—oh, love! so happy." She fell at his feet and laid her head upon his knees.

"The price of happiness is innocence, Mary."

"Not alone, it will not buy it alone, Anthony. Are we happy? either of us?"

"Ask rather what we might have been," he said, sternly. "It is the bad privilege of guilt to wreck the peace of others with its own."

"You still doubt me, you still accuse me, after this three days' absence? after all this misery?"

"After this three days' guilt and shame, Mary; after turning your husband's house into a hiding-place for your lover."

Mary sprang to her feet again.

"I never did—I have no lover. Richard Hathorne has not been here."

"Who opened that garden door, Mary? Who keeps the key? Who used it?"

"Dearest, I cannot tell. The key was in its place. I neither used it nor parted with it."

"Explain it then!" he cried. "Explain it, Mary!"

"How can I? There must have been a robber in the house."

"A robber! yes! Oh! Mary, if he had taken silver and gold; silver and gold, Mary!—"

"Husband! Anthony!"

"I know the whole truth," he cried. "It was Richard Hathorne who entered and fled again by that open door. I know it. I have tracked his steps to it!"

"No!"

He laughed. "Content yourself, Mary. You shall have justice."

"Oh, husband, I want love, not justice."

"Ay, Mary, I am afraid so. There's such a thing as guilty love, and there are those who crave for it, Mary."

She raised her head again, and gazed at him.

"I have never seen Richard Hathorne since Wednesday afternoon."

"Go on. Lies will not make it worse. Go on!"

"I am as pure and true as when you married me."

"Perhaps!" He said it in a tone of bitterness that struck her with fearful wonder. She made no answer. She stretched her arms out towards him; trembled; drew them back again, and hid her eyes as if they could bear the light no longer.

"I left you, Mary, fearing for you, but hoping more than I feared. All is changed."

She said nothing.

"You shall have justice, not the less, Mary. Be sure of that."

"I will!" she answered. "I will have it on the spot. Bring my accusers. Lose no time."

"No one but myself accuses you."

She uncovered her eyes. They were wild and dreamy.

"Some one has done this; some one with a wicked will."

"When I and Hathorne are face to face again, you shall have full justice, Mary."

"Do you think I can wait till then? Wait in this dreadful way?"

"That is my decision. Submit to it. If I judge you, I pity and will protect you. No breath of slander shall touch you while Hathorne is away. No man till he returns shall hear or utter your accusation. Innocence has patience, Mary. If you cannot feel it, you can act it. Where is the child?"

"Patience, Anthony!"

"Are you the only sufferer, Mary? Remember your husband has come home."

Mary looked at the window, and then at the outdoor garments which Anthony had not laid aside.

"Come home!" she cried. "Not to me; not to me! He is forsaking me!"

"It is best so," he said, huskily, rising from his chair. "Let me see the child. He remains here; take care of him."

She led him, with a face of strange com-

posure, to the quiet room, and the little white cot, and the rosy boy sleeping there. She thought the angels might be round her child, and might have pity on her. She ventured to take her husband's hand and draw it round her waist, as they stood together in that innocent bright presence. He felt what she was doing, and as his arm bent round in its accustomed place, he suddenly clasped her to his breast and passionately kissed her. But he left her next moment, left her, to fall fainting on the floor; for his kiss and his embrace were like those of one who thinks they are the last.

Mary lay down that night in utter loneliness, dressed as he had left her, sleepless, heart-broken and with the cry always on her lips, "Not to me! not to me! Never more to me!"

CHAPTER VI.

SUNDAY MORNING.

It was Sunday morning when John Griffiths crossed the Market Place, and stood at the Bank door. They were early people in Porchester, and the church bells were already ringing. John smiled when he heard them; they were ringing merrily like wedding-bells, and they cheered him. Perhaps most fathers, coming as he came and listening as he listened, would have heard only mocking music; felt only the satire of the ringing; turned from it with their hearts embittered rather than cheered. But John never heard the voice of mockery in anything. He knew the cry of joy and the cry of sorrow, but when bitter and biting things were speaking, they spoke in vain for him.

He rang at the private door, and a servant opened it. He asked for Anthony; Mr. Forrest was not at home; he was at his mother's, but Mrs. Anthony was upstairs. John looked very wistfully at the stairs, but he did not enter. He wished to see Mr. Anthony, he said, and would go to find him. They might tell Mrs. Anthony that her father had come, and would be with her pretty soon. So he left the door, and walked to the villa outside the town, where old Mrs. Forrest still lived in her widowhood. As he approached the house, he remembered the banker's sudden and recent death. "Poor thing!" he thought, "she's lonesome; it's good of him to come to her." He sent in his name, and was immediately shown into the room where Anthony had been breakfasting by himself. Anthony rose with all his usual respect to meet his father-in-law. The breakfast had been hardly touched, the young man's face was haggard and his eyes were blood-shot. He begged Mr. Griffiths to be seated, inquired whether he had breakfasted, ordered fresh coffee, slippers, and a fire up-stairs. John

thanked him for his courtesies, allowed the servant to take away his boots, drank a cup of the hot coffee, for he had travelled all night and had forgotten that he was fasting, and spoke mildly about indifferent subjects, till the door was closed and they were alone together. Then he put down his cup, his hand trembling as he did so, and got up from the cushioned chair that had been placed for him. Anthony had remained standing the whole time; when Mr. Griffiths rose, he bowed deferentially and stood waiting, with his eyes cast down.

"Mr. Forrest, I 've come about my Mary."

Anthony did not answer immediately. He paused to give his father-in-law time to speak further, if he so desired.

"Have you seen your daughter, Mr. Griffiths?" he said, as the old man was silent.

"No, sir; I 've not seen her. When I do see her, mayhap my heart may break, and I would wish to settle about her first, while the Lord spares me."

"Your errand, Mr. Griffiths, is a melancholy one."

"It's a sore trouble, sir, and if you think Mary's gone wrong, you're like to feel it as much as any."

"My grief," said Anthony, "is agony. I never knew grief before."

"I believe that, Mr. Forrest; but I think you've been deceived, sir. Mary's a good girl, sir. I'll not doubt my Mary."

"Has she written to you, Mr. Griffiths?"

"Yes, sir; she's written."

"When did she write?"

John took the letter from his pocket.

"Wednesday night," he read.

"On Thursday night, Mr. Griffiths, I was in London."

"You left her at home, sir?"

"I did so, by necessity. I left her fully warned, knowing that I doubted her."

"You're a just man, Mr. Forrest. I make no doubt you've had a cause. But she's innocent."

"I left her, doubting but still trusting her. I left her with my own honor in her hands."

"It was safe, sir."

"On Thursday night, Mr. Griffiths, she hid her lover in the house!"

The old man sank down upon his chair again. He looked at the letter in his trembling hand; at the stern and haggard husband; then, inwardly, at the memories of home.

"My Mary! I must see my Mary."

He tried to rise, but was obliged to rest a little longer.

"You've been a good husband, Mr. Forrest, and if Mary's wronged you, she's done worse, sir; she's hurt a kind hand and a just."

Anthony bowed gravely. "I have desired to do my duty," he replied.

Mr. Griffiths drew his hand across his eyes. "She's changed if she's done this. It goes hard against her, but I'll not believe it of her."

"You are her father, Mr. Griffiths. You know only what has been told you. Your feelings are natural."

"I'll see her, sir. She can't hide it from

me. If she's innocent, I'm not afraid but the Lord will make it plain. If——" but his voice failed him there. Anthony, unable to speak, walked quickly to the sideboard, poured out some wine and offered it in respectful silence. John Griffiths raised his eyes. They were full of tears, but there was a bright light in them.

"Thank you, Mr. Forrest; I'm but a poor creature when I think of Mary. But what I've got to say is right to be spoken. If my lamb's gone astray, sir, she's not fit to be your wife, nor your child's mother, and it's my wish you should send her home again, and let her be as she was before. If I'm not there, sir—and mayhap I shouldn't be there long—and if the mother went after me, as she'd be like to do; there's the cottage, for I've bought it, and there's enough to keep her; and she'd come to us, mayhap, the sooner and the better if she lay down alone again in her little room."

Anthony bowed reverently. "Let it be so," he said. But he would have fallen then, if no support had been ready to his hand.

"I think she's innocent, sir, but that's taken a deal off my mind. If you please, I'll go to her."

"Certainly, Mr. Griffiths. Your interview can hardly have any satisfactory result; but I should be glad to see you afterwards."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHEPHERD'S DAUGHTER.

John Griffiths left his son-in-law and walked back to Porchester. He rang again at the Bank door, and was told that Mrs. Forrest had not gone to church, but was waiting for him. He mounted the stairs as one goes to the solemn offices whose issue must be life or death; when the words, "Lord, now lettest Thou," hang upon our lips as prayers, and it is too soon to add to them, "thy servant depart in peace." He saw the door opened for him, and entered, and stood upon the carpet; and there, across the room, with opening arms and a low cry of comfort, his Mary came running towards him; his child, his glory, his bird of Paradise, his falling—oh! not his fallen star.

He did not clasp her in his arms. He put his hands upon her shoulders and held her from him.

"Mary, I must look thee in the eyes. There's a place for thee at thy father's heart and he'll have no shame to take thee, good or bad, Mary. But thou must tell him first; he must know what he's taking, Mary. Thou'st but to say it; I'll not doubt a word, nor ask thee ever again."

She stood before him, listening, and very still, dressed in the deep mourning she had worn since old Mr. Forrest's death, looking frail and delicate, not with disease, but sorrow, and clasping the fingers of her right hand close round her wedding ring. When he paused she lifted her eyes.

"Are there any young lambs on the mountains, father?—on the hills at home?"

"Ay, Mary; there's many a one."

"Are they pure and white, father, as they used to be?"

"Ay, Mary."

"Take me—take me! I am as pure as they."

"Oh, my child!—oh! my darling! oh, my Mary!"

There was nothing said for some time afterwards. They stood folded together; feeling the fluttering of each other's hearts; knowing that there was no more doubt between them while the heavens endured. Her face was hidden on his bosom. His was raised a little. He seemed to look at the blue sky through the topmost window-panes, but what he saw was through it and beyond it. Now and then his lips moved. The sentence was inarticulate, but it's last words seemed to be, "Depart in peace."

When Mary began to draw deep sighs at intervals, to move her fair golden head a little, and to press him tenderly with her relaxing hands, John took her to the sofa and they sat down together. Mary told him by degrees such particulars as she was herself aware of in explanation of what had occurred; told him how there had from the very first been an unfortunate difference between Hathorne and her husband on questions of local politics; how her early

indiscretion, and its consequences, had served to increase Anthony's irritation against Hathorne, and to injure her in her husband's eyes; how her love for Lucy had led her to intercede successfully in Hathorne's behalf when his factory was burned; how it was Lucy, nevertheless, whom she always cared for, and not her brother; how Anthony had tried to separate them; and how her final act of direct disobedience had been brought about, and had been followed by this terrible accusation. John Griffiths saw in her account much that might excite suspicion in an angry husband; and when Mary went on to tell him the strange events in the garden on Thursday night, as far as she herself understood them, her father could not but feel that the case was much against her, and might indeed justify any husband in condemning her. But his own unsuspecting nature was not made to grapple with complications of this kind. He fell back on the simple hypothesis that Mary must have made some enemy who had injured her without a cause. They went together through the list of

her acquaintance, only, however, to reject each name as it arose. They could not do it, as they could have no motive. When Owen Williams was mentioned, John looked for a moment doubtful. He had never seen Williams in his successful days; he had not been to Porchester before, since Owen settled there. His recollection of him was hardly favorable; it would have been quite the contrary, but that the kindness, already mentioned, which Owen had once shown to a poor boy in the quarry, had raised him immediately in John's eyes, and almost obliterated every disadvantageous impression.

"You've done no wrong to Owen Williams, Mary?"

"No, father; we get on very well together, and he has been the truest friend to Anthony. You know he even saved his life at the riots on the Fifth of November, and he has given up his own political prospects out of consideration for my husband. It would be quite unkind to suspect him, and unreasonable too, for he could gain nothing by my misery."

Mary spoke out of a simple trust, and John was satisfied.

"The Lord forgive them that have harmed thee," he said. "Mayhap it's best not to know them. Thou 'lt be cleared, Mary; be sure of that. Mr. Forrest's in the right: we must wait till Mr. Hathorne comes home."

Mary had begun to feel that this was inevitable, and with her father near her it seemed possible to wait with at least some outward show of patience; but her heart sank again when, asking for the news from home, she heard that her mother's health was worse than usual, and that John had left her in her bed with only the servant girl to nurse her.

"This trouble," Mary said, "might almost kill my mother, with you away. You must go back, father. You must not stay with me."

It nearly choked her to say so, but she said it bravely.

John made no answer.

"You must not stay," she repeated, kissing him.

He stroked her head tenderly.

"You'll be lonesome, Mary, I'm thinking. You'll have to wait, and it's hard."

"I know that; I know that: but I could never bear to keep you here and my mother ill at home. Don't fear for me, your coming has been such comfort. I can be patient—I can wait."

John thought a little, and then proposed that Mary herself should go back with him to Wales. It seemed a happy thought. It would take her away from the painful and difficult position she must occupy in her husband's home for the next week or two, while the illness of Mrs. Griffiths would account sufficiently for her sudden departure. But Mary would not listen to it. If her mother's life were in present danger she would go to her at all risks, but nothing less than this should make her leave her husband before Richard Hathorne's return. She saw at once that in Anthony's eyes, already blinded by suspicion, her journey might appear a flight; her motive a shameful one; her mother's illness the

excuse only by which she sought to cover her guilty fears. Her child, too, must be forsaken; her enemies, if she had any, left to work their pleasure, and if the charge against her got abroad in any form, her husband himself exposed to the additional satire and derision which the story of a runaway wife would bring upon him. No: she would face everything. She would hold her honorable post as mistress of his house and his child's mother, till he himself dismissed her from it. Her father should go back immediately. He should promise to let her hear at once if her mother's malady took an alarming form, and then, not sooner, she would come to him. He had been her blessing, her strengthener; she trembled to be alone again: but they would do their duty and trust in God.

She said it all with fearless decision, with pale lips but an undaunted mind, and John felt that she was right, and told her so. It was settled that he should go back that evening and write to Mary immediately on his arrival at home. Anthony had asked to see him again after his

interview with Mary; and when he had played a little with Master Tony, who wanted very much to know "why mamma had been sorry," and heard with some concern that his grandmother who lived among the sheep was ill, John Griffiths took his hat again and went back to his son-in-law.

Anthony received him with as much attention as before, and listened with feverish interest to the old man's report of what had passed. Not that he expected any fresh intelligence, but his love for Mary was catching desperately at anything that looked like a helping hand. But Mr. Griffiths could tell him only that Mary was innocent; that he knew it, and could pledge his soul upon it. Anthony turned impatiently away. He had a true respect for the old man, but he regarded him, perhaps with justice, as one of those simple-hearted beings on whose credulity a designing woman could practise as she pleased. If Mary's husband had only discovered her duplicity through the accumulated evidence of many months, it was not very likely that her father would see through the disguise she wore in

the course of a single hour. He told John Griffiths respectfully but plainly that his view of the matter had undergone no change, and that he adhered to his resolution of waiting till Hathorne's return before any further steps were taken. John tried to obtain a clearer account of the kind of evidence he was relying upon, or of the accusers by whom Mary had been maligned, but Anthony declined at present to go into particulars. He had several reasons for keeping silence. Perhaps the chief of them was, that a full explanation would involve an account of his visits to the Chancery House, and, in consequence, the whole story of his connection with Mrs. Fraser, and the difficulty of putting this matter in its true light, or indeed in any light that would leave his own honor unsuspected, seemed to increase every time he thought about it. Not, indeed, that he would have failed in doing justice to Mary rather than make these confessions; but at present he did not see that the case could be much altered by them, and he lived in a feverish belief that a few words with Hathorne would set all doubt at

rest and render needless any further inquiry of any kind. He found no consolation in this thought, for he expected only to see his doubts changed into awful certainties by Hathorne's guilty answer to his terrible demands. But even this aided his resolution. Once known, once certain, let the foul Past keep its own; let his happiness and the thing that ruined it be buried in the same blackness and silence.

Among his other reasons for saying nothing, one came from an opposite direction. The thought had once occurred to him that Mrs. Fraser might be plotting Mary's destruction, and that the whole tissue of his doubts might be a web of her weaving. It occurred on the occasion of his last visit to her, when her manner had been so changed, and the passion she had held so long under such close restraint had been allowed to show itself once more. He was first startled by the idea, and then he laughed at it. It was no pleasure to his vanity to suppose he could have been deceived so deeply by a woman whom he knew so well, and against whom he had at the same time so

much reason to be always on his guard. It was humiliating enough to have been duped by Mary; by Mrs. Fraser, it was ten times more so. When he examined the circumstances, too, he found little to support the notion. Mrs. Fraser professed to get the information she gave him through Fowkes of the Four All's, and Fowkes had a political connection with Hathorne, and might reveal the secrets either of himself or his party. But it was the betrayal of Anthony's own secrets that was the first serious evidence against his wife, for in these, and especially in the important matter of the Bridge Hill property, he could not conceive how any one but herself, and herself in the employment of underhand measures for the purpose, could have conveyed to Hathorne's house the knowledge which found its way thence to Mrs. Fraser. So the doubt suggested by Mrs. Fraser's manner was rejected by Anthony's reason. Nevertheless his present frame of mind was so far from being a logical, or in any way a consistent one, that sufficient doubt remained in it to create an undefined

desire for time to consider it further, to see Mrs. Fraser again, and to rest at intervals on such small hope as might be gathered from this vague uncertainty. At parting, John Griffiths told Mr. Forrest that he was going back to Wales on account of his wife's illness, and related also how he had proposed that Mary should accompany him, his reasons for the suggestion, and the grounds of Mary's refusal. Anthony smiled bitterly, but made no audible reply. "She is bold!" he said, inwardly. He should have said, "She is brave."

John went back to Mary, bearing a message from her husband, that, for the sake of appearances, he should call for her that afternoon and take her to church. He came accordingly; he found her ready, and with Tony in the room. She took the child to his father and put him in his arms. Very little was said: both of them tried to look as if nothing had happened, and both succeeded so far as to escape remark. John Griffiths went with them to church. Lucy Hathorne entered with them, hanging on Mr.

Hobbes' arm. Mary saw her, but turned to speak to her father before their eyes met. She saw Martin Dove coming in, and as he kept at a distance from Lucy, she made him the object of her observation whenever during the service she raised her eyes. Anthony saw this, and ground his teeth in silence. Mary thought she was pleasing him by carefully avoiding Lucy's pew, and the only thing she noticed was that Mr. Dove sat behind one of the pillars of the church; that if he leaned a little to the right, he could see the pulpit; if to the left, he could see Lucy Hathorne, and that there was a general left-hand leaning in his attitudes. Mary saw, and pitied him, while Anthony trembled at her side. They walked home; he left her at the Bank door with her father. He had given her to understand during their walk, that for the next week he should be a good deal out of town. She was touched by his delicacy, and thanked him with her eyes, but he left her with coals of fire on his brain, and turned before he had crossed the Market Place to forbid her

from seeing Martin Dove any more. He checked himself, however, and again turned his back upon the Bank. "Fool! can that save her? If innocent, I should only be insulting her; if not—why the devil will have his own!"

The night came down, John Griffiths went to the coach, and Mary to the bedside of her sleeping boy.

CHAPTER VIII.

PORCHESTER FAIR.

Long before daybreak on Monday morning Porchester Market Place was all astir. It was the first day of the great March Fair, and at that time fairs were still the carnivals of England in all her principal towns. Not so very long ago either. Their glory departed only when the railroads came, and most men who can count their quarter of a century have both seen the London Mail change horses and set their souls' happiness on a pleasure fair. The morning of this first day was sacred to the gods of hill and meadow and all other pastoral powers. All through the night it was as if Osiris and the shepherd kings were marching upon Porchester. The bleating of lambs, ewes, and wethers, the lowing of

milch kine and oxen, the bellowing of unruly bulls, the neigh and clatter of horses, big-footed, shaggy, and strong, the surly uproar of drovers, and the tread of countless hoofs upon the paving stones, announced the grand assault, the forcible entry, and the desperate resolution of the intruders, one and all, to establish themselves in the Market Place before sunrise.

With the early sun came the early buyers, poking into ribs of beef, pinching saddles of mutton, squeezing fillets of veal, with the life still in them and the voice of resistance loud. These shook their heads and looked disparagement at the owners, most of whom were British graziers, mighty men of renown on their own acres, who had made it their pride and boast from their youth upwards to stand behind fat cattle in Porchester Market Place, and who met their sharp-eyed customers with few words and imperturbable smiles, said "Done" at the right moment, and spent the rest of the day in satisfactory calculations and the pleasures of British beer.

By breakfast-time the invading hosts had begun to change leaders, and were moving off again in detachments down the chief thoroughfares of the town; some to graze in other pastures or wander over other hills; some to enter, with unwilling feet, the fatal portal where the knife, the axe, and the cord awaited them; some few to retrace their steps to their old quarters. Sticks beat the air by scores, and not the air only, but the backs, horns, and noses of the rebellious animals, who, some wrathful, some tired, some stupid, some hopelessly gone astray, were to be managed only by dint of shriller noise, more violent gestures, and more thorough thrashing than had accompanied their entrance into the town. About noon the greater number had been driven away by one means or other, stalls and booths were rapidly erected, Punch and Judy were carried by, the horns and cymbals of the shows at the further end of the Market Place were heard to sound, holiday people appeared on the pavements and the first day's pleasure fair was begun.

Then the Market Place became a world of

marvels, and the children of the townspeople came out for a delicious hour in fairyland. The dwarfs of the smaller shows rang their little bells out of their beehive houses, on raised platforms, in front of their portraits, with giants, fat boys, and fair Circassians painted on the same canvas. The learned pig made his appearance. The industrious fleas were eulogised by a showman in green livery with an armadillo in his hand. On the large theatrical booth, whose curtain was to rise that day upon the great sea tragedy of The Loadstone Rock, a crowd of characters in illustration of the British drama came out to show the splendor of their dresses and the agility of their limbs. Turkish ladies, forgetful of their veils, danced Scotch reels with Julius Cæsar and his company. Rob Roy Macgregor and the Queen of Egypt waltzed round them to the same tune. Hamlet, with a sheep's skull in his hand, stood lifting up his eyes in a dark corner. The Red Cross Knight clinked and clattered in his coat of mail as he walked up and down majestically with the Miller's Daughter.

A bolster, with Sir John Falstaff tied behind it, swaggered, drew its sword, and emptied flagons without number; the clown pulled geese out of his pockets, and harlequin jumped through the big drum at the end of every seventeen bars.

Close by, the trombones of the travelling menagerie lent their sweet voices to the public, and perhaps drew at least as large a crowd as the histrionic music and the dancing. For here, a live pelican of the wilderness sat outside, with a spot of red paint on its breast, and a basket of fish beside it; two monkeys jabbered among the musicians, and a series of huge pictures, such as Snyders never dreamed of, told the astonished gazers that under that canopy of canvas, behind those yellow walls, supported by those massive wheels, among elephants, zebras, spotted leopards, and striped hyenas, might be seen the great and wonderful lion Wallace, who had killed twelve bull-dogs at Oxford, broken a horse's back at Bath, and whipped off the legs of three Lincoln wethers with a switch of his tail.

Mary was young enough to take delight even in the follies of a fair. She had got her husband to

take her to the shows every year since their marriage; and on the last occasion Master Tony, at the age of two, had been introduced to the lords of the animal kingdom, and had heard the lion roar with all the rapture of a young hero. It was all different this Monday morning. A lonely wife and a weeping mother, Mary had heard through the sleepless night those sounds of preparation with which the streets were filled, only to recall the intolerable memory of what that day had been to her a year before. Her boy was with her. She could not bear to have him out of her sight. She kept him all the morning at the window, amusing him with the scene below and trying to bring smiles to her own cheeks that they might hide her misery. The boy had some dim remembrance of the wild beast show, and became restless to go out into the fair; but Mary feared to take him herself, and sent her servant to buy one toy after another as compensation for her refusal. All day she never saw her husband. She had a message from him, brought by the Bank clerk, to say he was too busy to come up-stairs and must leave town immediately after

banking hours, and to inquire after her health and Master Tony's.

In Anthony's present state of mind the idea of being alone with Mary till Richard Hathorne had come back seemed out of the question. He had written a letter to Hathorne, which, if it found him, would doubtless expedite his return, and was struggling to wait patiently and, as far might be, to reserve his judgment. But in truth his judgment was already formed, notwithstanding his vague uneasiness in regard to Mrs. Fraser, the failure of every effort to support the theory of even an attempted robbery on Thursday night, the fact that Hathorne had been inquired for by a legal messenger, and the evident belief on the part of the servants that he had been hiding in the house, all these things, added to what had gone before, still satisfied him that Mary was deceiving him; and, if deceiving him at all, her hypocrisy must be so perfect that the very worst suspicions were justified.

Anthony took advantage of the Fair to relieve himself of the first pressing difficulty of his posi-

tion. He told his partner that private business would require his daily presence that week at a market town ten miles off, and that as, in consequence of the bustle, his attendance at the Bank was also indispensable, he should ride out every afternoon and return in time for business in the morning. He thought, by this arrangement, to keep a partial watch over Mary and his boy without the necessity of any more private interviews with her. He let her know his purpose; it did not astonish her, and she submitted without remonstrance. But when he was gone, and the lonely evening light came through the windows, the chill of desolation and desertion seemed to strike her heart again, and the child wondered when she hugged him in her shivering arms, and asked her with childlike pity why she was so cold. So cold! before midnight she was throwing up the sash, and courting the night wind, because her forehead ached and burned. She was listening with flushed cheeks to every sound in the silent house, in a vague, vain dream that Anthony might be returning. She was keep-

ing the fire bright and the kettle boiling, lest he should come tired or hungry or longing for the old comfort of his home. She was praying with hot tears and an infinite penitence that any fault of hers, which in carelessness or ignorance she had forgotten, might be forgiven now, or punished by some affliction on herself alone; some grief which would yet leave her her husband's love and his dear company.

But he did not come. The Monday's cattle-fair was to be followed in due course by a cheese-fair on Tuesday and Wednesday. The country carts came pouring into the streets in the darkness. Many a farmer and farmer's wife spoke cheerily together under Mary's window while she watched and prayed, and she heard them, and grew cold again.

The next morning passed like the preceding one. Anthony, from his desk below, sent up the same message and inquiry as on the day before. Once Mary ventured down the stairs, feeling as if she could live no longer without seeing him. But she could only catch a glimpse of his face

behind two broad-brimmed farmers who were conversing with him over a bag of money. She could see that he looked wretchedly ill; and, though it almost broke her heart to see it, there was a cruel comfort in this proof that he had not yet forgotten her.

She went back to Tony. It was already afternoon, and on Tuesday afternoon he was sent regularly to the Borough Wall meadow. To-day, however, she could not part with him, or trust him even with his nursemaid. She would take him to the meadow herself. It was a fine day; perhaps it might refresh her. So they passed out together by the fatal conservatory, under the broken apple-tree, along the border where the prints of a man's feet going from the house were still visible, through the doorway of evil omen, along the private path, to the ruins.

Mary had taken her work with her. It was a little frill for Tony. It has never been finished. It was never worn, and never will be. She made a relic of it afterwards, and from year to year it lay in a little box of cedar among conse-

crated things. She sat down on a piece of broken masonry in front of the ruins where she could watch Tony at his play. He was making a collection of small bits of moss and fragments of mortar, which he gathered from the old Borough Wall and deposited in a little basket, decked out with cherry-colored ribbons, which his mamma had sent for from a booth in the fair. When the moss looked greener than usual, or when he found a pebble in the weather-beaten cement, he ran to Mary's side to display his treasure and get a kiss for doing so, and was on the whole so mightily pleased with these first fruits of archæological inquiry that for the time his passion for climbing was clean forgotten, and Mary's eyes, as they glanced continually from her work, found no reason for anxiety in his proceedings.

It was an unusual thing for her to bring him there herself on Tuesdays. Betsy's cousin, when he jumped over the fence that day, thought it not only unusual but disgusting. He jumped back again as soon as he became aware that

Mrs. Forrest herself was in the meadow, and took his revenge by going in search of Hannah with a packet of cakes, called sweethearts, from the fair. The meadow was very green and quiet. The tall elms were still leafless, but touched already with the yellow tinge of Spring. The gray branches of the three ash-trees, more cautious in their budding, had given no corresponding sign, but there were leaves on the lilacs growing on the top of the ruins, and a golden wallflower leaned over from between them towards a golden hawkweed in a crevice.

Mary sat working at her little frill (it looked like a snow-flake on her black dress), and thought of her great sorrow and of the days gone by. It was in that meadow that she had first seen Anthony after her year at school and with a lady's dress upon her. It was there she had sat beside him, almost the crowned queen of Porchester, receiving with him the smiles and homage of the multitude. It was under one of those ash-trees that Owen Williams had reappeared after years had passed without a thought

of him; Owen Williams, who, in the old time had treated her so ill, yet but for whose presence and promptitude her husband's life might have been sacrificed in the November riots. It was there, on the same day, that Lucy Hathorne received the hurt which averted for the time the threatened quarrel with Anthony. That silent and mysterious ruin was itself the cause of those political disputes to which she and Anthony might trace both their triumphs and their troubles. It stood from year to year unchanged except by the slow crumbling of time; and Mary looked and recollected till something awful seemed to creep round the old Borough Wall, and she thought, as fear and grief will often think, that ruined things last longest; that decay is stronger than all beauty; that happiness has the hope of dying, while life clings always to what is wretched and where to live is only to despair. Mary's eyes began to fail her. She covered her face with her handkerchief and bent it over her knees. They might be minutes, they might be only seconds during

which she thus lost sight of the things about her. She started at what seemed to be a short cry behind the ruins. She sat alone. Her boy had disappeared. She ran terrified round the end of the massive wall. He was not to be seen. She crossed the narrow strip of grass and looked in a kind of frenzy over the palings. Half way down the precipitous bank, caught by a tuft of gorse, the child's straw hat was hanging, its black ribbon flapping in the wind. There was nothing else, except the smooth river, sixty feet below.

In the moment's agony, Mary laid her hands upon the palings, seized with a wild desire to leap over them and fall headlong into the river. But in another instant she was running with desperate speed back through the private walk. the doorway, the garden, to find help that even yet might save her child. A few breathless words, a moment's hurry and confusion, and all the servants in the house rushed out of it; one to get the aid of the constabulary, another to run down to the bridge, if haply the boy had not

yet been carried beyond it by the current, others to the original scene of the disaster, and one on horseback to gallop after Anthony, who had already left town.

"Master Tony in the river!" "Master Tony drowned!" were the words on everybody's lips, and the news soon spread far beyond those immediately concerned. Mary had run first into the Bank, expecting to find her husband there, but she heard almost with thankfulness that he had gone. In the first moment, he might have said what would have killed her. She felt as if he would accuse her of the murder of his child. There was still a little hope; he might be saved before Anthony returned. She followed the gardener, who had gone down to the bridge. A few boats were always lying there. Two of them were manned immediately; one, with Mary in it, rowed up the stream towards the Borough Wall. The gardener, in the other, followed the current in the opposite direction. Very soon every available boat was in motion one way or other. Nets were drawn across the

river, and the banks began to be lined by eager spectators. Mary's eyes, straining from their sockets, looked through the clear water and fancied every wet weed to be her Tony's hair. They came where the little hat was still hanging overhead, and had found nothing. "Row back," Mary said, and the vain search was repeated. At the bridge they met the gardener returning with no better news.

"I shall search till I find him, or go to him," Mary said, with terrible calmness. She would not leave the boat, and the fruitless work was carried on. About sunset, she saw her husband gallop over the bridge, stop his horse, dismount, and come down to the river side. There he learnt rapidly whatever was to be told; ascertained what had been done; gave orders with his usual judgment and decision; remounted, and galloped up the Bridge Hill. Mary was in the boat, at some distance from the bridge. She soon saw him appear behind the ruins at the top of the high bank. She saw him look over, then hide his face, then look again, then speak rapidly

to those about him, pointing in various directions. She ventured to stand up in her boat and wave her handkerchief. Some one saw it and pointed it out to him. He turned quickly and looked at the boat below; then he put his hands to his mouth and shouted in a hollow voice, "Is anything found?" She shook her head and spread her arms out towards him. He turned again, making no other sign. It was too far off to see the expression of his face.

CHAPTER IX.

DEVIL'S HOLLOW.

While the sun was setting, while the shadow of the Borough Wall fell far down the river, and the red rays shot unnoticed up Prisoner's Hole, Owen Williams, with his hands in his pocket, his hat pulled forward, and a look of sullen and resolute thought about his face, was striding slowly along the path leading from the high road to the stone quarry. The workmen had already gone. The west wind was blowing. The gorse bushes bent over their own shadows, and drew back, and bent again. Dry leaves came rustling by them, and through them, dropping into little hollows, clinging to blades of grass, chased from place to place to the brink of the quarry, and

over it on to the stones below. The quarry had grown wider and deeper in Owen's hands. He walked through it to the part called Devil's Hollow, where the best stone was found. The excavation here was nearly circular; a hole about twenty yards in diameter and four or five in depth. It was joined to the rest of the quarry by only a narrow cutting, a few feet long, and wide enough for a barrow to pass. The opening was towards the west; the light was shining through it; a bright band, crossing the stony floor and illuminating the opposite wall of the hollow. Owen's shadow, as he entered, cut the streak of light in two and fell back across the rocks. He noticed it and smiled grimly, thinking of other men's superstitions.

He was fond of this place. When the men were gone the solitude was perfect. Many and many a time he had walked round and round this portion of the quarry in the starlight, or leaned against its roughly hewn wall, where the fossils lay so quietly and had lain so long, or stood in the midst, looking in dogged silence at the cold

moon overhead or at the black spot on the ground beneath him. He came there, generally, a night or two before the transaction of any important business. Often he brought papers there. There was a hole in the rock, in a sheltered corner, where he kept a private candle and a tinder-box, that if necessary he might refer to them in the darkness. Resolution, silence, and prevision were the characteristics of his mind. His obstinate and energetic will never left its fortunes to the risk of avoidable accident. His plans were almost always perfect if he had time to form them, and he invariably gave himself time, if it was possible. When a new scheme had to be elaborated or an old one reconsidered before the moment of execution, what he chiefly cared for was entire loneliness, where interruption was impossible. Then his thoughts could work in their own way and would go on working till they had done their business. He found this solitude in Devil's Hollow, and most of his designs since he came to Porchester had been arranged there. This evening, he

walked round the quarried space more deliberately, stopped more frequently, and kept his eyes upon the ground more persistently than usual. The line of light from the setting sun had been divided many times as he passed across it, but he did not notice it again. The evening clouds changed from gold to crimson, from crimson to purple, from purple to dappled gray, but it was not till the light had so far faded that at a few yards' distance you could barely see the stratification of the rocks, that Owen, stopping in the middle of the hollow, looked about him and perceived how the dusk was coming on. Stepping to the narrow cutting, where there was more light than anywhere else, he took a roll of bank-notes out of one of his pockets, unfolded, counted, and then replaced them. Afterwards he produced two or three folded papers, a foreign passport, and one or two printed bills. These were closely examined, and also replaced in his pocket. Finally, he took out four letters, two of them were notes in a woman's hand. He opened the first, read

it, tore it up and threw away the pieces. The second, which was by a different writer, he put back carefully and with a smile. He did so also with the third. His hands were generally steady enough, but to-night they shook a little. He had nearly dropped one of the bank-notes while he was counting them. When he opened the last letter, it actually escaped from between his fingers, and a gust of wind coming through the cutting from the larger quarry, caught it and carried it away. Williams knew there was nothing of importance in the note; he was only clearing his pockets of unnecessary lumber; but he meant to tear it, and turned sharply after the flying page. It flew to the other side of the hollow and dropped there. He followed, and stooped to pick it up, but the wind caught it again, and drove it round at the foot of the wall. As Williams again pursued, a stronger gust came through the cutting, struck the circular sides obliquely, made an eddy at the bottom of the hollow, and carried the unlucky paper half-way round the circumference of the place, Owen continuing the

chase and trying vainly to put his foot upon it. When it came to the opening, where the night wind was rushing in, it was caught into the air again and fairly carried up to the top of the quarry. Owen could see it dimly above him, at the very brink of the excavation, flapping impatiently between two sprigs of overhanging heather. He thought he could climb up to it and tried to do so, but in the faint light he mistook a line in the rock for a projection, and only came to the ground again, spraining his foot and blaspheming angrily. The letter escaped from the heather sprigs and was blown out of sight at the same moment. He shook his foot, and cursed the paper and the wind. Not that he had lost anything, but because a trifle had baffled him, and partly because he was in pain. "It's Devil's Hollow, let it go to the devil," he muttered. The wind hissed like a snake, and the heather nodded. He rubbed his ankle and rested a little. He had finished his thinking before he took his papers out, and finding that

he could walk pretty well, though not without limping, he left the place, crossed the larger quarry, took the path to the high road, and went slowly home.

CHAPTER X.

LIGHT ON THE WATERS.

All night the dismal search for the lost child was continued with unavailing energy. The river, illuminated by torches in the boats and bonfires on the banks, was dragged again and again between the bridge and the Borough Wall. By daybreak it was a settled point that the body must have been carried lower down. Nets had already been laid across, half a mile below the bridge. They were now to be taken two or three miles further, and some beds of reeds and osiers in that direction were to be searched. Anthony left the river-side and went up to the Bank to do such business as was indispensable and to consult with the chief constable. While there, Mr. Fowkes of the Four All's requested a few

words with him. He had news, he said, about the child. The news was, that a passing traveller had just stated that late last night he had seen the body of a little boy dressed in black and white taken out of the river at a place twenty miles down the stream. The details were all confirmatory. Anthony finished his business with the utmost despatch, and was in his saddle again in a quarter of an hour. He rode off at once to the place mentioned by Mr. Fowkes, directing, however, the continuance of the efforts arranged already, at least till after his return.

Mary, who had been on the water all night long, and had never been able to speak to her husband—he seemed by his movements to avoid her—learning that he had gone up to the Bank, made the boatman put her on land again and followed him there, resolved at all risks to see him. She, in turn, was followed by Owen Williams, who had been watching her boat ever since sunrise from behind a hawthorn hedge near the river. He took the trouble, as he went

along, to ascertain from Mr. Fowkes, who met him, that Anthony had already started. Mary, finding on her arrival at the Bank, that her husband had gone, and hearing the report about the discovery of the body, went up-stairs to give way to a mother's anguish. It was all over, then. There was nothing more to be done but to lay her darling in his grave and pray to follow him. The servants, frightened by her appearance, entreated her to eat some breakfast, which they assured her Mr. Forrest had been persuaded to do, and she swallowed what was offered to her. The strong coffee after her fasting and exposure gave her a new strength and an excited energy. She sprang up. She must do something. She would follow Anthony; perhaps she might meet him as he returned.

As she formed her resolution Owen Williams came into the room. He found her looking flushed, daring, and desperate. His own face was something darker than usual, and when he spoke he stopped once or twice as if there were an impediment in his throat.

"I have better news, Mrs. Forrest."

"Better! My boy is drowned!"

"I hope not, madam:" but Mary only laughed and shivered.

"I have made a strange discovery, Mrs. Forrest. The boy has not been drowned; he has been stolen."

"Stolen! my boy stolen! my child alive!"

"I have no doubt he is both alive and well, and is at this moment in the town of Hull, at the mouth of the Humber."

Mary caught his hand.

"How do you know it?" she cried. "Tell me how you know it, Owen Williams. Stolen! not dead! not drowned!"

"I know it on the evidence of one of the thieves who fell into my quarry last night and broke his leg. Being abandoned by his fellows he has confessed to me. A gang of foreign gipsies, brought here by the fair, found you alone with the child by the Borough Wall. When you seemed to sleep they took their opportunity. The hat was thrown over the bank

to mislead suspicion, and while you were seeking the boy on one side of the ruins, he was carried off on the other. They have taken him post-haste to Hull; their purpose is to cross the sea with him; they know his father is a banker and think he will pay high for his child."

Mary had seen Betsy's cousin jump over the fence, and had wondered at the time who he was and why he had gone back so hastily. Doubtless he was one of the thieves.

"Pay high!" she said, "we will pay everything. What do they ask? Who is to be dealt with? Mr. Williams, I know how to work, if they ask all our fortune. Only let them give me my boy."

Owen smiled slightly.

"There is no one here, madam, who can be dealt with, and nothing but instant decision and the utmost speed are likely to prevent the child's embarkation for the Continent. I have a clue to the haunts of the thieves, and should have been already on my way to Hull, but that the boy will

probably be disguised and I cannot trust myself to know him. Mr. Forrest has left the town; it will be too late when he returns. I don't see any chance of succeeding unless you go yourself, Mrs. Forrest, and immediately. My carriage is at the door with post-horses; the inside is at your service; I will get on the box, and we may be in Hull this afternoon—that is, if you can make such an effort."

Mary listened, breathless with excitement. For a moment she hesitated.

"My husband! Oh, if I could see my husband!"

"I'll write a note of explanation while you get ready," Owen said.

Mary seized a pen with her own hand, but it shook so much she could not form a letter.

"Write; pray write!" she cried. "Tell him I go to bring back our child alive."

She was dressed already. She ran only to tell the servants what she was going to do, and to tie some of her boy's warmest clothes in a little bundle.

"Betsy shall go with me," she thought, but Betsy had gone again to the Borough Wall meadow. "What matter—what matter!" Mary said inwardly. "Let us save the child."

Owen Williams was sealing his note when she came back to him. He threw it on the table.

"There's no time to lose," he said.

They hurried down-stairs. Mary sprang into the carriage; Williams mounted the box; the postilion bent forward, with a sharp stroke of his whip on the necks of the horses, and they galloped away.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BEND IN THE STREAM.

Anthony, meanwhile, was riding hard and thinking bitterly. Driven almost mad by his belief in Mary's infidelity and the necessity he had laid upon himself of waiting with a show of patience till Hathorne's return, the sudden loss of his boy had turned into a species of fury all the remaining tenderness of his grief, and he had purposely prevented himself from meeting Mary because he felt his passion to be so fierce and uncontrollable that his fancy shuddered at the idea of what he might say or do. He had left the child in her keeping. She had robbed him of all else, but he still trusted her with that sole remaining treasure. Her own hand had led him to the brink of danger and death; her own eyes were the false hireling

shepherd's, who left his lamb to the wolves. Servants, to whom the boy was nothing, had cared for him, had watched him, had kept him safe from harm. She, who should have given her life for him at any time, who should have lost her soul rather than one hair of his head at such a time as this; she, his father's wife, his own mother, she had taken him from his warm and guarded home to have him drowned under the cold, pitiless river. Was that all? Was that the worst? Was Mary anything she seemed? Had he married the very serpent of deception, the green and gilded horror, the witch of murder? Had she drowned him herself?

He galloped furiously. The pace was as desperate as his thoughts. The ride of twenty miles was over in little more than an hour. His horse stopped, trembling and covered with foam, at the door of the little village inn to which Mr. Fowkes had directed him. The hostler came from the yard, looking at the poor brute and shrugging his shoulders. Anthony sprang to the ground and threw the reins into his hands.

"Where's the child?" he said. The man stared at him.

"Please your honor—"

"Where's the dead body?" Anthony demanded in an excited tone.

"There ain't no dead body as I know on," replied the groom, staring wider. Anthony lifted up his whip. He felt ready to strike him. The landlord came to the door.

"What's up, John?"

"Blest if I know. Gen'leman wants a dead body."

"There's nothing of the kind here, sir. Will you please to walk in, sir? Take the horse round, John; he's a-going to drop."

"My child has been drowned in the river. I am told his body has been found here and seen at your house."

"Oh, dear, no, sir; never heard of it before. We've picked up corpses here at the bend, sir, but it's six months sin' the last were got out."

"Do you know I am a magistrate? Are you trifling with me?"

"Wouldn't do it on no account, sir. If your child's got drowned it's bad enough without, I reckon."

"Do you mean to say you have heard nothing about the finding of his body?"

"Not a word, sir, on my solemn oath; nor any soul in the village, I dare be sworn."

"Oh, my boy!" Anthony dropped his whip and staggered. The landlord compassionately held out his arm.

"Better walk in, sir, and sit you down. You've been deceived, sir."

"Ay! I have been deceived!"

"Give the gentleman's horse some gruel, John. He looks uncommon bad. Walk this way, sir."

"No. Show me the bend in the river. Take care of the horse. I have twenty miles to ride."

He felt persuaded now that Fowkes had deceived him purposely; perhaps out of mere spite and malice. But physical exhaustion, the shock of disappointment and the renewal of

all his grief, which it occasioned, subdued the anger of his mind, and he went like a man stricken and broken-hearted to gaze down into the quiet water, where lifeless limbs and long matted hair had more than once been found by the villagers, but where he looked vainly for any, the smallest trace of his lost child. A lingering hope kept clinging to him nevertheless. He could not leave the place till he had personally examined the river banks for a considerable distance and made inquiry at almost every cottage. He had no lack of sympathy. The inhabitants all turned out to aid him in the search and ask about the accident. In two or three hours he knew that it was all in vain. His horse was jaded. The landlord shook his head, and predicted that he would fall with his rider before they had gone a couple of miles, but Anthony remounted and made the best of his way home. It was a long and weary ride. He drew the rein at the Bank door about six o'clock in the evening. The horse died that night. Perhaps his master envied him. But the news that met him at his door was

startling. The child was not dead, but stolen, and Mrs. Forrest had gone to fetch him home. There was a letter up-stairs for Mr. Forrest. He went up, as in a dream, and saw it on the table. The writing was Owen's. He knew it, and broke the seal.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WHITE ROAD.

It was about nine in the morning when Mary and Owen Williams started on their journey, and they had a hundred miles to go. To those who lived in Porchester, Chosen Forest lay between them and the setting sun, and travellers to the east coast, therefore, did not cross the hills. Instead of that, the first stage lay through meadows, low and fertile, divided by hawthorn hedges and watered by the river; among small manufacturing villages, full of hand-looms and little children; by water-mills and wind-mills, farmers' homesteads, and the seats of country squires. They had been dear and familiar scenes to Mary. The great meadow where she had

taken her boy to see the flood; the bank where he gathered his first violet and picked up his first snail-shell; the little hollow where he had fallen in the snow; the knoll from which she and Anthony had watched a merrymaking among the village children, when there was yet no child at home; the mansion where she had paid her first awful visit as the banker's wife; the farm-house, only a few miles from home, where, returning from their wedding journey, her husband had stopped the carriage suddenly and begged some hot milk for her from the dairymaid, because she shivered and was cold.

At the end of the first stage, while the horses were being changed, Owen Williams got down from the box and opened the carriage door. His manner was respectful and almost formal. Mary's eyes were red. The wild excitement had gone out of them. She leaned back against the cushions and had her handkerchief on her lap.

"I hope, madam, you are comfortable?" said he.

"Quite, thank you."

"Did you breakfast before leaving home, madam?"

"Breakfast! I think I did. I forget. Indeed, I believe I am rather hungry. Could you bring me something?"

He bowed, and in a few seconds brought her wine and biscuits with his own hands. She took them from him, but she thought again of the hot milk and the journey home, and could not thank him. She could hardly swallow.

"Are you warm enough, madam?"

She bent her head a little without speaking. He closed the door, got on the box again, having already paid the last postilion, and told the new one to go on.

A country of hill and dale; the sunshine very bright, the leaves opening everywhere; the carriage rolling rapidly with a lullaby motion down long descents, upon a well-kept road. No more sounds of looms in the villages. No more familiar scenes. The children playing quiet games, the dogs lying lazily under sunny walls, the laborers

in the fields wiping their foreheads, though it was not summer. The road passed through a country town where there were no paving-stones; by quaint suburban houses with flowering lilacs and laburnum bowers; by a ruined and mossy archway of the Norman age; by an old abbey church with zigzag tracery and a great central tower, with other ruins near it, and tombstones round about, and a bell tolling. The postboy slackened his pace cleverly. The carriage stopped without a jolt before a white hotel.

"Look sharp! fresh horses!" said Mr. Williams, getting down again. He went to the door of the carriage, but stopped, and did not open it. He saw that Mary was asleep. She had gathered herself up upon the seat; her head was resting in the corner; she looked completely exhausted and did not stir.

He drew back a little, stood on the pavement, where he could see her through the glass, and kept his eyes upon her till the horses were changed. The dismounted postboy had touched his hat twice and mentioned his own calling,

and the groom had said, "Ready, sir," before Mr. Williams moved.

"Drive on!" he said, jumping on the box. "No trotting; gallop, my lad. Never mind your neck; I'll pay for it. That's it; that's it. Keep 'em at it!"

The same kind of country, up and down, for another stage. The same good road and lullaby motion. The sunshine always warmer. The sky as blue and calm as in a dream of peace. The fields becoming larger and the hedges lower; sheep, of greater size, scattered in wider flocks over the pastures, and cattle in vast herds lying on the slopes or lowing on the ridges. The villages few and small, and the traffic scanty. At length another town, on a height, with battlements in front, and a steep stone bridge under the castle wall. There was a jolt on the bridge and a rattle up the paved street, and when the carriage drew up Mary woke with a start and pulled down the glass hastily.

"Where are we? I have been asleep. Are

we nearly there?" she asked, as Williams approached. She was flushed with her sudden waking and the excitement of the question. He told her the name of the town. They had made good use of their time. They had travelled forty miles in three hours and a half, but it was scarcely half way. Mary heard, and fell back wearily. He brought food again. She thanked him without smiling, and took what he gave her without looking at him. Her eyes were fixed on a doorstep a little way up the street, where a well-dressed child about three years old stood prattling to his lady mother.

"The sun's hot," said Williams.

"Yes."

"We're turning north here. We shall have it behind us." Mary neither answered nor moved her eyes.

"You've had a good sleep," he said. Mary put her handkerchief to her face. The door had just opened and the little boy had disappeared.

"You'll be all the better for it. It's refresh-

ing," said Williams. Still neither look nor answer. She did not even notice the familiar tone in which he was speaking.

"Can I do anything else for you, madam?" he asked, impatiently.

"No, thank you."

He could not catch her eye. He stood a moment looking fierce and frowning, then turned abruptly, took his seat, and gave the usual order to drive on at full speed. Mary would have been only too glad to sleep again through another stage, but her eyes would not close immediately. They were looking in all directions for the little children. By degrees, however, the motion began to soothe her, but as she settled herself languidly and was drawing down the blind, a new excitement seized upon her. She saw two gipsies sitting under the hedge as the carriage flew by. In a moment her head was out at the window.

"Mr. Williams!"

He turned quickly, leaning towards her over the rail of his seat.

"Did you see those gipsies?"

"Under the hedge, madam?"

"Yes; they might be the thieves!"

"Not very likely."

"But if we should pass them on the road?"

"No fear of that, madam."

"How do you know? They have not had much time."

"Quite time enough, you may depend on it."

"Not if they had to walk. How would they get to Hull?"

"Plenty of coaches. Easily done when time's an object."

"But pray look out as we drive along. I feel so wretched. Couldn't we drive back and question those gipsies?"

"Losing time, madam, and nothing to be got out of them."

"You are quite sure? Well, pray stop, if we come to any more of them. I keep fancying we may have passed my boy."

"Better be a day too soon than an hour too late, madam. We've been lucky! We've

lost no time. Push on!" he said to the post-boy.

Mary drew back her head, but for the rest of that stage she was looking out for gipsies at every turn in the road, the smoke of every distant cottage made her think of their wild encampments and feel as if instead of hastening to him she was flying farther and farther from her child. They rolled thus into the city of Lincoln, dashed up the hill and stopped almost under the cathedral tower. The great bell was sounding heavily and a pompous funeral was passing by. The plumes shook and nodded in the sunshine; the black horses moved sleek and slowly by Mary's foaming ones. Owen Williams turned his back upon the funeral. He did not go to the window as before. He went into the hotel and called for brandy, looked at the cathedral clock, felt in his pocket for some papers, as if to satisfy himself that they were there, stood for the next minute a little within the doorway, where he could look at Mary without being seen by her, and then went to speak to the postboy.

She saw him come out of the hotel when they were ready to start, and noticed for the first time that he limped a little.

"Is this Lincoln?" she said, looking out.

"Yes," he answered.

"Then we are more than half way."

"A great deal more."

"You have not seen any more gipsies on the road?"

"Not a rag of them."

They drove on. The funeral was out of sight; the tolling bell could be heard no longer. The road, ascending and descending again and again and straight as an arrow in its direction, lay for many miles through high, open country, and became excessively lonely. It was Wednesday afternoon, and the market-days of the larger towns in the district were Tuesdays and Fridays. Scarcely a house could be seen for miles. They met the Hull coach going southward, but, afterwards, neither wheels nor passengers. Mary, looking forward always, could see a small plantation of lofty fir-trees by the road side. The sun bright-

ened their red trunks, but their tops looked dark and melancholy. They grew close to the road and were separated from it only by a low stone-wall, broken through in several places and generally ruinous. The road was dry and white; the wall, nearly the same color; the ground under the fir-trees, barren of vegetation and covered with leaf-dust and cones. They were abreast of the ruined wall when the carriage stopped suddenly. Williams got down and opened the door.

"What's the matter?" Mary asked.

"Unfortunately, madam, the tire of the off hind wheel has snapped, and the wheel is likely to go to pieces."

"Whatever shall we do? Are we near a posting house? I can walk a long way, I'm sure."

"There's no place nearer than Lincoln; the carriage must go back. We shall have to lose an hour, but it can't be helped; we've come very quick."

"Lose an hour! We may lose everything! Is there nothing else to be done? Can't we mend it here?"

"Quite impossible; we should lose more than an hour if we broke down all together; might break our necks as well."

"Let us go back at once then."

"I'm afraid, madam, you must get out and wait here."

"Get out! Why should I?"

"Because it's just as much as the wheel will do to take the carriage to Lincoln, and with you in it there'd be a smash in five minutes."

Mary looked round alarmed. "Is it so bad?" she said. "This place is so lonely."

"I shall stay with you, madam."

"We might walk after it," said Mary, getting out, "and meet it as it returns."

"We should gain nothing by that; only knock ourselves up, perhaps. We're lucky to have the shade of the trees, and the wall to sit on."

Mary remembered how he had limped, and thinking he must have hurt himself, and that it would be unkind to ask him to walk, she made no further opposition. Owen took some money from his pocket and gave it to the postboy.

"Look sharp," he said, "but mind what you're about; you may be back in an hour."

The man nodded, turned his horses' heads, and drove back at a moderate pace.

"The wheels seem very steady at present," Mary said, looking after the carriage.

"Yes," replied Owen, "we stopped in time."

She sat down on the broken wall, he did the same at a little distance from her. Both were silent; Mary soon turned her eyes northward, thinking how far they had yet to go, while Owen still watched the receding carriage. Mary looked along the wall and saw a squirrel there. He had dropped his food and was running up and down in search of it. He was bold, in spite of his mild face and timid eyes. He ran within a yard of Mary; she remembered how her Tony had prattled about the squirrel at Chosen Forest the week before, and would have given much to fold the little nimble hairy creature to her bosom. When she held her hand out, however, he took fright and was soon in one of the fir-trees. Mary, watching him, stepped through

one of the openings in the wall, to pick up cones in the plantation. She thought they would amuse her boy. Owen followed her; the carriage had just disappeared down one of the descents in the road.

"I have a few things to tell you, madam; we may as well make use of the time."

"Anything about the child?" she said.

"Partly, madam."

She leaned against a fir-tree, not far from the wall. He did the same; there might be a couple of yards between them.

"You saw a lady at the Chancery House, last week," he began.

"Yes."

"You had seen her before."

"I told you so."

"You know something of her history."

"I never said so."

"Decidedly not; you can keep secrets."

"You astonish me, Mr. Williams."

"I shall have to do so. That woman slept with you six years ago in Wales, the night

after Mr. Forrest had left; the day you promised yourself to him."

"I don't know where you have heard this, Mr. Williams, or why we should talk about it."

"We shall see, madam. That woman, her name is Mrs. Fraser, had a lover, and quarrelled with him; you know that also."

"If I do, it cannot concern us; it has nothing to do with my boy."

"Have patience, Mrs. Forrest. She went nearly mad after that lover. After a while, she tried to get him back; found she was too late; he married another woman."

"I didn't know he married. I know she found he was engaged."

"He married, madam. But people don't always change from hot to cold at the parson's bidding. She never gave him up. She's been waiting for him at the Chancery House."

"Is he a widower, then?"

"No."

"She is much to blame."

"More than you think, perhaps. She has not waited for nothing. He visits her."

"As a friend?"

"No. As a lover."

"And his wife alive?"

"I can swear to it."

"Then let us say no more about her."

"A little more, madam. He goes by the private path among the trees."

"Probably."

"There were the marks of a horse's hoofs on the grass there."

"I remember there were."

"So he keeps a horse, and rides."

"No doubt he does."

"And lives in the neighbourhood."

"Of course."

"And may be seen sometimes on Chosen Forest, near the Chancery House."

"I suppose so."

"And may have to excuse his rides there on pretence of business."

"Very likely."

"Especially to his wife."

"Well, Mr. Williams?"

"Do you know him, madam?"

"I! How can I know him?"

"He's your husband."

Mary started violently, with the cry of one stabbed in the dark.

"He has deceived you, Mrs. Forrest."

She drew up, proud, rigid, and disdainful.

"You are telling falsehoods, Owen Williams."

"I have proofs of what I say."

"What do I care for them? I know enough of proofs, and their cruelty," she answered, scornfully and bitterly.

Williams took two papers from his pocket.

"You know your husband's writing. This is one of his love letters." He opened and gave it to her. It was Anthony's writing and signature. It began,—"My dearest Catherine." It was dated years back; some time before Mary's own engagement. She colored as she read its passionate lines, but she turned fiercely on Williams:

"How dare you show me this! What are his

secrets to you? When this was written he was at liberty to love as he pleased and write as he pleased."

"I received that letter," he said, "from Mrs. Fraser. She was not Mrs. Fraser when it was written. The address is to her maiden name. Here is one of a later date." He gave her a second note. It was as follows,—

"To my vexation I cannot come to-morrow. I will be with you certainly on Friday, at four o'clock. Be careful that we are private. Yours, Anthony Forrest." It was dated only a fortnight before, and was addressed to Mrs. Fraser. Mary remembered that her husband had ridden out that Friday afternoon.

"Take it back!" she said, passionately. "It proves nothing."

"Most people," he replied, "would think it proved a great deal."

"Then let them! I know him; I love him; he is my husband. Do you think I'd believe him guilty of a shameful deed? No; not if I saw him do it!"

"He repays your confidence with a vengeance."

Mary blushed with sudden wonder and alarm. Did this man know everything?

"What do you mean?" she asked, under her breath.

"You know what I mean, Mary. He thinks you are false. He is doing all he can to get rid of you."

She could not answer. The struggle was too great between grief, astonishment, and shame. That he should know this! that he should even call her Mary! Was she so ruined—so despised?

"I've seen what he's been driving at," said Williams. "He was engaged to Mrs. Fraser before ever he knew you. The time you saw her in the village, she had come there after him. She settled at the Chancery House since her husband died, for the sake of being near him, and there he has visited her. His heart's set on a divorce, and he has caught at the first story against you. You may shut your eyes, but you can't get rid of the facts."

"I scorn them—laugh at them."

"That doesn't alter them."

"I utterly deny them all. I refuse to hear one word against him."

"Is that how he treats you, madam?"

"Oh, God!—oh, mercy!" She clung to the rough pine-tree. The dark boughs shook over her like the wings of death.

"Mrs. Forrest, the chance of your living peaceably at home again is small."

She stooped to pick up Anthony's letters, which had dropped from her hands.

"It seems to me, madam, that you are divorced already."

She raised herself with a start.

"To find your own door shut in your face would be disagreeable, madam."

The letters fell again. She turned deadly pale. She was looking fearfully at Williams. He seemed to speak with difficulty. He clenched his teeth for an instant, as if holding himself under violent control. He glanced along the road, north and south. There was an uninterrupted view for more than a mile in both directions.

"Mary!" he came a step nearer to her. "I loved you before he did. I'd a better right to you than he had. We were matched in station; we should have risen together."

She said nothing, but she clung to the tree again, with her eyes still fixed upon him.

"He casts you off," continued Williams. "Let him. Take another husband. Come with me."

He stretched his arm out, but Mary flung from him so violently that though he tore her dress he could not hold her.

"Coward! coward!" she cried, standing behind the tree, gathering up the torn folds in her hand, panting and glaring at him. Williams did not move.

"Everything is ready," said he. "My affairs are settled. My fortune is in my pocket. The carriage is waiting in the next hollow. The wheels are sound enough. In three hours we are in Hull—in another hour we're sailing to the Continent. Mr. Forrest won't follow us. He'll go to Mrs. Fraser."

"Villain!—devil!"

Williams frowned impatiently.

"You are pretty much in my power, Mary Griffiths. You may as well listen to reason."

Mary laughed wildly. She looked round at the lonely place and the silent road.

"You think you can frighten me!" she said.

"No; I don't. I make you a fair offer."

"Oh! I know you now, Owen Williams; I remember the brook and the stepping-stones!"

"Give me an answer," he said.

"An answer! What do you take me for?"

"I take you for a cast-off and runaway wife; for a woman without a home or a husband. I've set my heart on you, and there's no help for you. You shall have your own way about it and take your own time. I'll marry you abroad and satisfy you any way you please; but I've got you, Mary, and I won't lose you. Give me an answer."

"You insult me by every word you say. You disgrace me by looking at me."

Owen, with the look of one who holds his passions with a grasp of iron, paused for a few seconds. He was reckoning up his own resources and arranging the elements of his power.

"Suppose I leave you?" said he.

"There's nothing else in the whole world that I could ever thank you for again."

"And the child?"

"God help me! I shall find him."

"You think so, do you?"

"Yes; if I search every house in Hull."

"You may search till doomsday. He's not there."

"Not there! My boy not there!"

She clung trembling to the tree again.

"How could I help it? How was I to get you here? Was it any use talking to you at home? I meant you to hear me, and I didn't mean to speak for nothing. I had the chance. I invented the story."

Then Mary burst into an exceeding bitter cry, and was as helpless for the moment as an infant drowning. But Owen stood still and silent, as

if to show her he would respect her grief. When she had partly recovered herself, he stepped forward again, saying,—

"Come! he's not there, but give me your hand, Mary Griffiths, and we'll find him."

But Mary's anguish had given place to feelings bordering on frenzy. She sprang backwards towards the wall of the plantation. At that place it was higher than usual, and there was a short return piece. She found herself penned in the angle made by it. Wild and desperate, she caught up one of the heavy stones lying loose on the top of the wall.

"If you touch me, if you come a step nearer, I'll kill you!"

Williams paused. "Let us talk about the child," said he, thinking to soothe her.

"I'll talk of nothing; I'll hear nothing."

"Listen. I can give you the child."

"You're telling lies. You've told nothing else. My boy is drowned! is drowned! Thank God, you can't touch him."

"I tell you, he's alive."

"Dont speak of him. How dare you speak! I'll go back to my husband."

"Suppose you consider a little. His opinion of you is pretty well settled by this time. He thinks you 've cheated him and gone off with me."

"Cheated him! I have gone for his child, his boy; he knows I have."

"Does he? Remember, I wrote the letter."

She stared at him in horror.

"He 's not quite the husband, Mary Griffiths, to open his doors when his wife runs away in another man's carriage and comes back on his hands the day after."

She saw at last the depth of his design and the terror of her own position. Betrayed, deceived, bewildered, uncertain of everything and hemmed in on all sides, she felt herself at bay, with all the world against her. Once more she looked round fearfully. There was the long, white, lonely road, and no help near!

"There's only one way out of it," said Williams. "Take my offer."

"Tear me to pieces first!"

He saw the flash of her eyes, but the trembling of her limbs also.

"Come!" he said, boldly. "Let's bargain for the child."

"Go back! God keeps him. You can't find him. My boy! oh, my boy!"

"I can, I tell you."

"Liar!"

"Do you want me to frighten you?"

"I don't care; I won't stay here! Let me go! —let me pass!"

"Come, then; the carriage is waiting."

"Go back to it, Owen Williams."

"Not alone, Mary Griffiths."

She laughed.

"Girl! make up your mind! Am I to carry you?"

She laughed again, drawing closer into the corner of the wall.

"The child's safe—you shall have him and keep him."

"Oh, my boy!"

"You think he's dead?"

"I know he is. I thank God he is."

"You may believe me."

"Believe you? Never again!"

"Suppose I could show him to you?"

"All lies! all lies! Go back!"

"Fool! will you give me nothing for him?"

"Nothing in this world. Nothing for anything; not a sixpence!"

"Then throw your stone if you dare!" he cried, stamping with his foot, and springing towards her. Mary, shrieking, threw it with all her might. He fell to the ground. It was not the stone that struck him—it flew over his head, but the foot he had hurt was wrenched by his sudden effort, and the moment's agony brought him down. Mary rushed by him as he lay, and fled through the plantation. In a few seconds, thinking she must have killed him, she turned hastily round. He was on his feet again; he shook his fist at her. She ran blindly on. Having got clear of the trees she continued flying across a large open field till her breath

failed. Turning again, she could see nothing of him. He was in no condition to pursue. He had made his way into the road again and was limping in the direction in which the carriage had driven.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. HORNBEAM'S ANCESTORS.

The report that the lost child had been stolen by gipsies, and that Mary and Owen Williams had gone in search of him, spread quickly over Porchester, and it was not long before Lucy Hathorne heard it. Lucy knew nothing about the quarrel between Mr. and Mrs. Forrest, or about her brother's imaginary exploit in the garden, and she had not been able to see Mary since the loss of her child. Both she and Daniel Hobbes, however, had been among the most active of those engaged in searching the river and seeking information up and down. When it was understood that Anthony had received definite news at last and had ridden off to the place where the body had been found, Lucy went home to rest a little, and to consider what she had better do for the comfort of her

afflicted friend. She had put on her bonnet, and was just going to the Bank, when Mr. Hobbes ran in, smiling and excited.

"My dear Miss Lucy! such news! such news! The boy's not drowned; he's been stolen!"

"Oh, goodness! Mr. Hobbes."

"Carried off by the gipsies; the greatest vagabonds on the earth."

"Oh, bless their hearts, I could kiss every one of them!" cried Lucy, clapping her hands.

"To be sure, it's better than drowning—better than drowning; but we haven't got him yet, Miss Lucy."

"Never mind, if he's alive. Let's run to Mary. Do you think she knows?"

"Mrs. Forrest's the finest creature I ever saw: except yourself, Miss Lucy; except yourself. She's gone after them. Out on the river all night—knocked to pieces you may say with the affliction; I caught sight of her this morning, poor thing—poor thing! but she wouldn't wait a minute. We'll have the town out to meet her if she brings him back, God bless her."

"Dear me, Mr. Hobbes! does she know where they've taken him?"

"I'm not certain, Miss Lucy—not certain; the servants are in such a flurry. One says Hull, and another says the hills, and the footman thinks it's an old hall they're camped near. The danger is, these vagabonds give us the wrong scent, and make their little arrangements under our noses."

"Oh, for goodness sake let us search as well, then. I'm sure I saw some gipsies in the fair last night; I'm sure I did. I'll be bound they're not far off, Mr. Hobbes; do, pray, see if you can find them anywhere, and have them before the magistrates."

Daniel Hobbes undertook this task with great alacrity and went at once into the Market Place. The business was chiefly over by Tuesday night, and the fair became something of a carnival on the third day. Long brilliant booths were filled with fairings of every description; from gingerbread to work-boxes; from Dresden china to dominoes. Crowds of country people were pouring through them. The shows were full. The

Loadstone Rock was enacted every two hours. The swing-boats carried crew after crew into the air, and games of all descriptions were played in the open spaces. About noon, Mr. Hobbes, somewhat out of spirits, was returning slowly along one side of the Market Place, still looking for gipsies without finding any. On the other side, Mr. Hornbeam, rather the worse for liquor, was walking in a bullying manner in company with Mr. Fowkes, and just before them, with a satirical smile on his face, Mr. Beaumont, the lawyer, stood on a door-step, looking at the crowd.

Among the games of the fair, the catching of a well-greased pig was traditional and in high favor. Several of these hunts had already taken place behind the shows, and another had been started. On this occasion, Martin Dove, passing by the scene, was hooted and badgered by the boys, till in a fit of wrath he rushed himself in pursuit of the pig they had just loosened, resolved to catch it and carry it off. Immediately, with roars of laughter, all the other pursuers stopped short to let him have his way and to

see the fun. One knocked his hat off, another cut his coat tails. Martin, furious, but determined to have his revenge, dashed after the game and made a pretty run of it. The pig was lively, a speckled one, black and white, young and squeaking. He threaded his way through the crowd, over their toes, between their legs, from one end of the Market Place to the other, with Martin, bare-headed, ragged, and hot, grabbing every minute at his tail. Turning back he wriggled through a group of girls, who screamed, laughed, flapped their aprons, and turbulently made way for him at the entrance of one of the grand booths. Down the middle of the booth he went, prancing and squealing, and Martin after him, with an uproar, and now and then a crash, and a noisy issue at the further end. It was this famous hunt that Mr. Beaumont the lawyer was watching from the door-step, and as the little pig capered across an open space on that side of the Market Place and within a few yards of him, he called out, in the political satire of the town, "Well done, young Horn-

beam!" Now Mr. Hornbeam, being close at hand, heard his voice and resented it.

"Do you speak of me, sir?" he cried, turning sharply.

"No, sir."

"You used my name, sir."

"I did, sir."

"Then you spoke of me, sir."

"No, sir, of your ancestors."

"You're a block, sir; you're nothing but a gate-post."

"You are drunk, sir."

"Drunk!" bawled Mr. Hornbeam at the top of his great voice. "Drunk!" he shouted, and the sound echoed over the Market Place. It reached the ears of Mr. Hobbes on the opposite side. Crossing over to see what was the matter, he fell in with Mr. Fowkes, who, in stolid prudence, had drawn back a little, thinking that the Porcite chieftain might fight his own battles for himself. There was no friendship possible between Hobbes and Fowkes, but Mr. Hobbes never bore malice, and thinking suddenly that

the landlord was a likely man to help him in what he was searching for, he took him unexpectedly by the button and said—

"Fowkes, my good fellow, have you seen any gipsies in the fair?"

Mr. Fowkes looked down upon him with a scowl. He neither forgot nor forgave, and nothing in the world would have pleased him better than to do Mr. Daniel Hobbes a spiteful turn.

"Gipsies?" said he. "I should say so."

"Where, my dear fellow? where?"

"Not here," said Fowkes.

"Anywhere near? I'd give a bottle of wine for one of the predestined sinners."

"There's a whole lot of 'em camped by Devil's Hollow," said the landlord.

"You don't say so! Good-bye, Fowkes, good-bye; come for the wine to-morrow. No more aquafortis, I say!" and Mr. Hobbes ran off as fast as he could go. The landlord looked after him, whistled, winked, and stroked his chin. It was a good long walk to Devil's Hollow.

A long walk, but Mr. Hobbes made the best of his way, and arrived there steaming. Not a trace of a gipsy, however; he asked the workmen; they knew no more than he did; Mr. Hobbes felt considerably down-hearted and began to think he had been made a fool of. As he turned homeward in dejected mood, the paper blown out of Mr. Williams' hand the evening before, stuck in a gorse-bush under his eyes. He took it up. "Oh, ho!" said he, after reading it. "Owen Williams among the ladies. I'll have a joke with him." So he put it in his pocket.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SEVENTH LOVER.

"MARY GRIFFITHS is your wife no longer. She has accepted my protection, and we go together on the plea of finding your child. You know me. You need not follow us. When I tell you our plans are perfect, and that we shall have left England before you read this, you will probably believe me. I've made a fool of you from the first. The marks of your whip are on my shoulders, but I think we are square now.—OWEN WILLIAMS."

That was the letter which Anthony found waiting for him when he returned that evening from the vain search after his boy's dead body. He read it in the parlor where Williams had left it. He had closed the door, and for an hour

afterwards the servants, whose curiosity led them to it from time to time, could hear no sound in the room. About seven o'clock he came out, stooping and tottering. He went to the kitchen, and made a few calm inquiries. What had Mrs. Forrest said before she left? Had she written anything? Had she stated where she was going? When did she go? He heard their answers without remark. He had his hat on, and went out immediately afterwards.

"Master looks very bad," said the housemaid.

The cook shook her head for answer.

"He's done for the horse anyhow," said the gardener.

"Is it dead?" the footman asked.

"No, it ain't dead; but it's all over with it."

"It's my opinion master's going after the child," said the cook to the housemaid, in a sepulchral voice.

"What, after missis?"

"After the child, I say."

"Do you think missis won't find him, then?"

"It's my opinion she'll not bring back the dead, and she doesn't mean to."

"Oh, Lord, how you talk!"

"If you think you'll see missis again, don't be too sure of it," said the cook, always in the same prophetic voice; and she went about her business. Her fellow-servants looked ominously at one another. One rubbed his head; another whistled; the housemaid uttered several exclamations and went to see whether the fire was burning up-stairs, and to light the candles.

Anthony called at two or three houses, asked questions, and departed. What he heard satisfied him that the story about the gipsies, which Mary had related to the servants, was all a fable; that his own journey had been contrived to get him out of the way; and that Williams had turned most of his own property into ready money within a week or two. Anthony went back to the Bank, walked up-stairs to the room where he had found the letter, and rang the bell.

"Let all the servants come here; the Bank clerks also; and my partner."

They came very quickly; some looking alarmed, some curious. Anthony was sitting by the table, with his hand upon Owen's folded letter. He was stooping as before, like an old man. It might have been the candle-light, but more than one of them thought his hair was grey. He pointed out a chair to his partner, but without speaking—the others stood. All were silent for half a minute — Anthony did not look at the assembled group. There was a portrait of Mary on the wall, and his eyes were fixed there.

"It has pleased Heaven to destroy me," he said; and the servants cast down their eyes at the sound of his calm hollow voice.

"My boy is dead: there is no doubt about it. My wife has deserted me: that also is true."

There was a great movement among the listeners, but they suppressed their exclamations.

"I have been a fool, and worse. I have deserved what I suffer. Let no one blame her."

The maids raised their aprons to their eyes.

"She is the victim of the worst villain in the world. Say no more of him."

He crushed up Owen's letter in his hand.

"What I shall think it right to do, you shall know hereafter. It is too late to save her. But attend to me; I have one definite command to give."

They listened in silence.

"If she should return——" He paused. "I speak of possibilities," he said, quickly. "If she should return, treat her with all honor and tenderness; as a stranger asking kindness—as a sufferer needing help. Supply her wants; obey her wishes. Inform me instantly of her arrival; but, remember, I can never see her again."

The servants began to sob.

"You may leave me," said Anthony, rising from his chair. "Let the house be cared for, and the room above kept as she has left it. I shall not sleep here any more."

He bowed to his partner, who retired gravely,

without speaking, followed by the weeping household. On the stairs the cook, nodding slowly and wiping her red eyes, said, whispering, to the housemaid—

"I told you so! I see'd it in master's face. It'll be the death of him!"

Left alone again, Anthony reopened the crushed letter, read it again slowly, and as slowly walked to the fire and put it between the bars. Then, with the same deliberation, and in the same bending attitude, he walked up-stairs into her chamber. He looked in the mirror where she used to dress, and touched the ornaments on her table. He opened her wardrobe and her drawers one by one, and closed them, all except the last, disturbing nothing. In that there was a little box, and in the box some hair. He took out a long golden curl, cut off in one of her illnesses, and shut the box and the drawer. He closed his hand upon the curl and went to the bedside, and knelt there. Rising up again he left the room, went down-stairs, put his hat on, and walked out of the house. He went to his mother's. It was

late, and she had gone to bed, but he asked to see her in her bedroom, and immediately told her what had happened.

The good lady was in weak health and was terribly shaken by the news. Her husband's death had made her a settled invalid; the loss of her grandchild almost broke her heart; and now the trouble of her house seemed utterly overwhelming. It seemed to be only her sympathy with her son that kept her alive. It was at once decided that he should live with her, but when he agreed to that arrangement he looked at the mourning dresses hanging in the room, and pressed his heart, and smiled.

CHAPTER XV.

TO PORCHESTER.

When Mary found that she was safe and was not pursued, her strength deserted her at once, and she sat down on the grass, utterly exhausted. The field she had crossed was a quarter of a mile in width. She had the fir plantation in full view and could not be approached from it unawares; so, turning her face in that direction, she let her feelings have their way. They were in strange disorder—a mixture of terror, gratitude, grief, shame, and indignation. She did not know indeed how Heaven had cared for her; how earth and air had been charged to keep her; how, when the plot was at its worst against her, a gust of wind and a spray of heather in Devil's Hollow had made her safety sure; but she felt

there had been a great deliverance, and her first tears were shed in thankfulness that they were not forced from her by despair. Her lot, however, seemed hard enough at the best. The sudden destruction of all her hope about the child, for she no longer doubted that he was dead; the dreadful thoughts in connection with her husband and Mrs. Fraser, for, though she believed nothing and accused him of nothing, the unexplained mystery was terrible; above all, the idea of what Anthony must be feeling towards her, for she knew now what Owen's letter must have contained: all these together were sufficient to account for the sobs that shook her as she sat and the despairing looks cast round her when she raised her eyes. Rising up at length, conscious that she must do something and that the only thing to be done at present was to return as soon as possible to Porchester, she reached the high road again. Looking along it, southward, she could see the top of Lincoln Cathedral, still in the centre of the straight white line, though many miles distant. But the fir plantation stood between,

and she could not bring herself to pass it. She fancied Owen Williams might be lurking there, so she turned her steps in the other direction, hoping either to meet a coach or to come to the next posting station. It struck her suddenly that she had no money; Williams had paid for everything. Taking her purse out in alarm, she found a sovereign there and a little silver. That was a comfort: she could not post back with it, but it would pay the fare by coach. Hurrying on, a man with a spade on his shoulder met her, the first passenger she had seen. She was going to speak to him, but he looked so forbidding, or her suspicions were so awake, that she preferred crossing the road, passing him as fast as possible. He turned, looked after her and laughed. Mary, hearing him, began to run. He gave a shout and made a feint of following her, the effect of which was that she ran till her bonnet came off, and her hair fell about her in confusion. Stopping, and finding him out of sight, she made herself as neat as she could again, and went on, breathless. In another

quarter of an hour a white house came in sight by the road side. It was the posting-house she had been hoping to find; there was no village—nothing but the small public-house and some considerable stables. Mary went in; a surly man with one eye met her; she found he was the master.

"Can you tell me how long it will be before the next Porchester coach passes?" said she.

"Three hours, or better."

"Three hours! Is there no other?"

"That's all to-day."

"I want to get there as soon as possible. I generally post: I am a banker's wife, and could pay you well, if you would send me there."

The man looked at her from top to toe. Her torn dress, her untidy hair, her heat and agitation, were not particularly reassuring."

"Show us your money, my lass," said he, gruffly.

"Unfortunately I have only about a pound in my purse."

"Don't give no trust," said the man.

"I have a gold watch and chain," said Mary, hurriedly taking them off.

"Don't know nothing about gold watches; the fare's fifteen shillings by coach."

"It's so long to wait!"

"Can't help that. Folks should know where they're going."

"Could you send me as far as Lincoln?"

"Cost you thirty shillings, gates and all."

"Oh! I am very sorry: let me rest then, if you please. Is there any woman in the house?"

"Peg!" said the man, turning round, "take the lass up-stairs and give her a cup o' tea."

He seemed to feel some pity for her, though his opinion of her character and intentions was clearly of the least favorable kind. A dirty, raw girl answered to the name of Peg, and led Mary to a parlor overhead. Mary dropped into the first chair. She was quite overdone, and was afraid of fainting.

"Please, miss, you're tired," said Peg.

"Very tired."

"Please, miss, I'll get some tea."

"Thank you; I shall be very glad."

Returning with it, the girl found that Mary had not stirred. She set the steaming cup before her with some bread and butter, and left her.

"The missis is gone to Hull, please miss, but if you want owte you can call," and she shut the door.

Mary drank the tea and revived again. There was so much to do, she could not afford to sink. To go home; to meet her husband; to bury her child, for by this time his body must be found. It was a heavy burden, and as she sat alone the weight grew awful. Unable to keep quiet, she called the girl, but, getting no answer, went by herself into the first room in which a looking-glass was to be found. When she saw herself in it she forgave the landlord his doubtful looks, and began hurriedly to put herself to rights again. Coming back to her parlor in comparative neatness, and noticing by the way that a separate flight of stairs led down into a little flower-garden behind, and that the flower-garden was itself the corner of a field with sheep

in it, she again called for Peg, and, her call being attended to this time, borrowed a needle and thread and employed herself in mending her torn dress. Putting her hand into her pocket when this was done she drew out of it unexpectedly a child's frill, half finished, instead of her handkerchief. It was the work she had on her lap when her boy's cry startled her, for the last time, at the Borough Wall. She had pushed it into the pocket as she ran round the ruins, and it had remained there. The sight of it overpowered her now. So short a time ago! it was only yesterday; her boy was alive when she saw it last! Since then, the stifling water had choked his breath; the river bed had bruised him; the slimy weeds had wound about him; there had been that night in the boat, that morning, that dreadful day! She put the little frill to her lips, and kissed it and cried. It was so wet when she laid it down, it might have come from the drowned boy. Whatever happened, this frill was a relic she must keep while she kept anything. Pure white, but wasted

and unavailing, like her boy's innocence and her own, it was an emblem of death and sorrow, of life unfinished, and life it must be grief to wear. She pinned it in her bosom where she thought it would be safest, and looked at her watch. The three hours had nearly passed; the coach would be due in about twenty minutes. She went to the window, putting her bonnet on. The view was down the road, towards Lincoln. She saw a carriage coming. It was the one she had left; it was Owen's. Seized with violent terror; assured that he was looking for her; and with the idea flashing through her mind that he would call her his wife and get the help of the landlord in securing her, Mary ran out of the room, down the staircase she had noticed, across the little flower-garden, over the field where the sheep were feeding, and into a lane beyond it. There she stopped for the first time, and, crouching down, looked over the low fence to see what might happen. The carriage had stopped already at the public-house. She could see part of the hind wheels. She fancied some

one came into the garden. She fled down the lane. Some trees soon shut out the view of the road and the post-house. Mary rested again and listened. She heard a coach horn sounding. It was the coach she should have gone by; the only one that night. It was too late. She knew she could not reach it before it passed, even if she had dared. It was past sunset already. She walked on, without any object. "Shall I die here?" she was thinking. But the lane led her to a farm-house. She asked for shelter there, hardly knowing that she did so. The people were kind, and not inquisitive. They gave her a bed, asking few questions and satisfied with such replies as she was willing to make. She learned that there would be no coach till nearly noon next day. She passed the night in a kind of stupor. When the time came for her to go she had some difficulty in moving her limbs. The farmer helped her to the road. The coach was stopped; she got in it, and was on her way to Porchester.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WIFE'S RETURN.

The elopement of Mrs. Forrest and Owen Williams was, of course, the chief subject of conversation in Porchester on Thursday. Everybody was astounded, and most people, on this occasion, confessed it openly. Mary had made many friends, and, perhaps, no enemies, among her fellow-townswomen, and there was a universal cry of pity for herself and indignation against Williams. Lucy Hathorne, however, was the only one who refused altogether to believe the statements that were made. They might say what they liked; they might show her as many letters as they pleased; she cared for nothing and for nobody; she knew Mary was as innocent as her

dead boy. If she were not, there was no such thing as goodness anywhere, and one might as well be wicked at once and then drown one's self. The other ladies shook their heads at her doctrine and said the best of us had our weak points, but they only made Lucy angry, and she hurried off as soon as she could to find Mr. Hobbes, sure at least that he would sympathise with her. She was not destined to see him that day, however. He had been tempted to undertake another will-o'-the-wisp hunt after gipsies, and had left home early, having a good many miles to go.

Some of the people blamed Anthony pretty roundly because he had not set off immediately in pursuit of the fugitives. He knew, however, that with a man like Williams a nine hours' start made the chase a hopeless one, and he was by this time so entirely satisfied that Mary had resolved to leave him, and had ceased to care for him; and so broken down in spirit by the loss of both wife and child, that he had no heart to bring her back, even had it been possible. He had seen his

lawyer, however, the night before, and had arranged with him the best practicable method of tracing Williams on the Continent, of keeping watch over Mary in case he should desert her, and, if possible, of bringing him to justice. He sent the wretched news in a short letter by post to Mr. Griffiths; spent the whole of Thursday in a new but still unsuccessful search after the body of his child; and went home to his mother's in the evening without having been to the Bank that day.

All that afternoon, Mary, in the tedious coach, had been on her way to Porchester. What she had done and suffered had begun by this time to tell fatally upon her, both in mind and body. She had wakened from the night's stupor with a haze about her from which she had no power to clear herself. She left the farm-house almost without a word, and got into the coach in silence, looking through the windows as she rode along like one who thinks the world a vision and expects to see it pass away.

At dusk, the coach stopped in Porchester

Market Place. Mary stepped out in her former silence and crossed to the Bank door. The footman started back when he opened it: "Oh, Lord, it's missis!" he cried down the kitchen stairs. She entered, however, saying nothing, and went ghost-like to the drawing-room. The servants, following in trepidation, found her walking slowly round it. She stopped as they entered, and turned towards them.

"Where is he?"

"Oh, my dear missis! my dear missis!"

"Where's my husband?"

"He's bid us be very kind to you, ma'am."

Mary stared at the speaker, looked round the room again, sobbed hysterically, and fainted. They caught her in their arms, and laid her on the sofa with great tenderness. The housemaid ran for water; the cook produced her smelling-bottle; Betsy, the nurse, took off her mistress's bonnet and loosened her dress; and the footman stood ejaculating at the end of the sofa. Mary soon recovered, and rose immediately, in spite of their solicitations.

"Give me my bonnet, Betsy. I am going to him. Have they found the child?"

"No, ma'am; nowhere."

"Give me the bonnet!"

"If you please, ma'am ——"

"I know where he is. He has not come back here. He is at his mother's. Give it me."

"You'd better not, ma'am."

"I know what you all think of me. You are all deceived."

"We hope so, ma'am; but he'll not see you."

Mary snatched the bonnet from her, and began to put it on. "You may go!" she said.

"We dursn't let you see him, ma'am; we'll do all your will but that. We're very sorry, ma'am, but we dursn't."

Mary was tying her bonnet; she let go the string.

"Is that his order?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She threw the bonnet on the table, seized a piece of paper, and wrote rapidly—

"I am here: I am innocent: let me see you."

"You can take this to him?" she said.

"Surely, ma'am; anything you please."

"Lose no time then, and bring me his answer."

She sent them away.

"Not see me! not see me!" she cried, walking up and down the room when she was alone. "Oh, love! oh, husband! He'll surely see me."

She had not very long to wait, but it was long enough to change her faintness into fever. His answer came, not himself. She knew that, when the door-bell rang, for he rang differently. She took his note, and shut herself in the room again before she opened it. It was longer than her own.

"I cannot see you: the house is yours while you desire it. My fortune is yours, as far as you can use it honorably. Whoever treats you rudely, makes me his enemy. I have promised to send you to your father. The time depends on your own choice. Your wishes shall be

obeyed, with that sole exception; I cannot see you."

Mary tossed back her matted hair and wiped her forehead. She went to the window, drew the blind up, and looked at the lighted town. "It glares, it glares," she said. "Oh! it's frightful." She dropped the blind again, took her bonnet from the table, stole quickly but noiselessly up into her bed-room; looking behind her. She went to her dressing-table. She took the gold chain from her neck and laid it down with the watch that hung by it. She stripped her fingers of all their rings but one. She took off much of her dress and every kind of ornament, and going to a chest in the room, she drew from it the clothes she wore as a peasant girl before he married her. She put them on, and a dark shawl over them. She went to the drawer from which Anthony had taken the lock of hair, and took from it a small sum of money, one jewelled bracelet, and one of her wedding-cards. On the card she wrote—"Dear Love—I have gone home. Your true wife, Mary,"—and laid it on her discarded jewellery, and

with the bracelet pressed to her heart and the money in her right hand, she glided down the stairs again, opened the front door unseen by any one, and crossed the noisy and flaring Market Place among the crowds still gathered by the fair.

CHAPTER XVII.

BETSY'S GHOST.

While Mary waited for her husband's answer, the servants, mindful of their master's directions and moved not less by their own compassion, had brought her every luxury the house contained, made the room as comfortable as possible, and persuaded her to eat and drink. Finding afterwards that she had gone to her bedroom and supposing she would not wish to be disturbed, they had closed the shutters for the evening and sat down to an early supper in the kitchen. There was a general disposition to sigh: the women were startled by small noises, and the footman and gardener were mute till they had had their beer.

"Poor thing! poor thing!" said the cook, over her toasted cheese. "She looks as bad as master. Lord bless us! only think!"

"He's soon got tired of her," said the housemaid.

"Ah! Sally dear, it's always the way."

"Didn't you think now it were Mr. Hathorne?"

"Well, I don't know; I never took to that somehow. Always thought he looked steady."

"Well," said the footman, "that's just what I thought of Mr. Williams. If looks is anything, damn him, he looks as steady as a pump."

"He's a deep one," said the cook.

"Missis is deep, anyhow," said Sally. "How the mischief she got that man in the house and nobody know of it is what I can't get over."

"Easy enough," said the footman. "I'll bet a shilling it was Mr. Williams hisself."

"I'll bet a shilling it wasn't," said the gardener.

"Why, how 's that, then?"

"Them footmarks was too big for Master Williams."

"Mister Hathorne's feet's big enough," said the cook.

"You're right," replied the gardener.

"Lord bless us!" cried Sally. "Why then it's both of 'em! The house ain't fit to live in. It's not decent. I'll give warning, that I will."

"It's my opinion we've all got warning," said the cook in an awful voice.

"You don't say that, now!"

"It's my opinion they're both going after the child, and they'll all three be together before a month 's out. The house is empty, Sally. I feels it."

"Don't now! I'm all of a shiver!"

"I've been feeling it ever since that blessed child were drowned. My patience! who 'd have thought he could clamber over the palings!"

"Master said he couldn't," said the gardener, "but when he come to look, there were a big nail just right for him. I thought he'd ha' dropped when he found the nail."

Here Betsy the nursemaid gave a scream and fell into hysterics. Being restored by the good offices of her female friends, she began to cry

and to make confession, relating in broken sentences how her cousin had been used to visit her in the meadow on Tuesday afternoons; how, beguiled by his sweet company, she had neglected her duty; and how, on the very Tuesday before his death, Master Tony had nearly performed the desperate feat of climbing up the palings.

"Betsy," said the cook, shaking her head, "I'd have thought better of you."

Betsy sighed deeply and rocked herself in her chair.

"She's got some more on her mind," said the housemaid.

Betsy sighed again.

"Let's hear it," said the cook.

"Speak up," said the footman. "We're all friends."

"I seen a ghost!" said Betsy with an effort, which was followed by a general ejaculation and a movement of chairs round the table.

"What was it like, now?" asked Sally, rubbing her hands nervously.

"It were like a woman in black. I seen it

three times. It come twice and talked to the child, and gave him something sweet, when I were busy with the young man; and it come again last Tuesday was a week, when he tried getting over the palings. It wasn't me as took him down; it were the ghost!"

"Are you sure it were a ghost now?" asked Sally.

"Yes, I'm sure. I thought it were a woman, but I never seen how it come or where it went, and it were a death-token to the child. I seen the young man this morning. He says, 'Betsy,' says he, 'I were looking for you in the meadow on Tuesday when the boy were drowned. 'Good lack!' says I, 'what did you see?' 'I see two women in black,' says he, 'by the Borough Wall. One were sitting at one end and the other were standing at the other end, behind like, and the boy were playing between them,' says he. Now it's my belief the one sitting were missis and the other were the ghost."

"Mercy save us!" said the cook. "Have you told master?"

"No; not a word of it," said Betsy.

"I think he'd ought to be told," said the gardener. "May be it's the ghost as done all the mischief with missis."

"Well, to be sure," said the cook; "I shouldn't wonder. She's been a good lady, and I don't think it's herself."

Consoled by the idea that Mary's delinquencies might have been caused by supernatural influence of an evil kind, the servants betook themselves to rest, carefully avoiding dark corners, starting at the first view of white curtains, and looking stealthily under their beds. In the morning they knocked at Mary's door, which she had closed when she left the house. The footman was soon despatched to inform Anthony of her disappearance, and the rest of the servants, somewhat trembling and uneasy, decided that everything should be left as it was till he arrived.

He came quickly, and went up to Mary's chamber. There he found her clothes upon the bed, her jewels on the table, and, lying on them, the

wedding card, with her half illegible writing: "Dear love, I have gone home."

Gone home! Had she gone to her father? Gone home! Was there a worse meaning in the words? He ran from the house to the coach offices; no female passenger had been taken up there the night before. He inquired at all the inns; no carriage had been hired. He went back to her room to examine the card again; to search the dressing-table for some other message of explanation; and finding nothing, he shuddered with deadly fear.

He felt as if he had killed her. The cast-off garments, the discarded rings, the words, "I have gone home," seemed full of the same dreadful story. What home was left her, but the grave? Guilty, but perhaps repentant; sinning, but surely suffering, she came back to him and he refused to see her. It was too much; it had driven her to madness; the river that held her child was flowing over her already, and he had not seen her, and never could again.

So he thought, and as he did so his calmness

utterly forsook him; a passion, fierce and desperate, boiled in his veins; a strong resentment, born of his own grief and his own self-accusation, which, turning from Mary's imaginary guilt, looked only at her wrongs and her betrayers, and asked to heap up punishment upon their heads as a savage heaps a funeral pyre. Locking the chamber up and taking the key with him, he hurried out to institute a new search in the river, not for one dead body only. He made inquiries, indeed, again at the coach offices, but without hearing anything, or hoping to hear. No one had seen Mary; at least no one had recognised her; nor was any clue found to trace her by, either towards the river or elsewhere.

The report that Mary had drowned herself in the night spread with the usual speed. Mr. Hobbes heard it at an early hour, when on his way to Lucy Hathorne, and was the bearer of the ill news to his betrothed. He cried like a child when he told her, and was to all appearance as likely as any other to commit suicide in despair; but Lucy rejected this report as summarily as she had the former charges against Mary.

"Have they found so much as a hair of her head in the river, Mr. Hobbes?"

"No, Miss Lucy. Poor dear! they've found nothing."

"Then it's just another of their precious stories, and it's all a shame together. Do they think it's like an innocent woman and next to an angel, if she isn't quite, to go and drown herself before the matter's cleared? I say it's false, every bit of it. There are fifty places to go to besides the river."

"But her clothes, Miss Lucy; poor thing! poor thing! Where else could she be going without them?"

"Well, I don't care. I wouldn't believe it if she went naked through the Market Place," and Lucy paused and blushed at her own enthusiasm. She had no need, however, for Daniel Hobbes was as guileless as a little child. "Perhaps it's some of Williams's work," she continued. "Perhaps he's bribed the servants and carried her off. Who knows?"

"Bless me, Miss Lucy; nobody knows."

"Have you shown Mr. Forrest that scrap of a note you found at Devil's Hollow?"

"I had reserved it for some festive occasion, when a joke might be in season. Now, unhappily, an improbable event; a most improbable event."

"But I'd show it him at once, for certain."

"The note contains nothing; literally nothing, Miss Lucy."

"Never mind; it belongs to Owen Williams, and I'd show up every stick and stone of his I could lay my hands on. He's a wretch and a villain and anything he's touched may tell of him. Dear me, I'd pick up his very buttons if they dropped on the floor, and take them before a magistrate."

Mr. Hobbes smiled in admiration and needed no further urging. He had much of Lucy's simplicity of faith, and he went at once in search of Anthony. He found him in the Bank parlor, standing, and with his hat on. Mr. Hobbes, with tears in his eyes, held out his hand.

"My dear Mr. Anthony—"

"I have done, Hobbes, with both ceremony and friendship. Do you want me? Have you anything to tell?"

"Looking for gipsies in Devil's Hollow—I might as well have looked for ammonites in a crater—I picked up this insignificant and uninstructive piece of paper, which appears to be a note from a lady to a man who has disgraced our town. There is, as I have pointed out to Miss Lucy, nothing in it, but under the circumstances it seems, my dear sir, most fitting to give it into your custody."

Anthony took the note impatiently; colored when he saw the writing; read it eagerly, and exclaimed—"What can this mean?"

"I can offer no conjecture; no conjecture."

"Thank you—thank you. You know nothing more about it?—Good morning."

He hurried out. He was on the point of sending a messenger to Wales when Mr. Hobbes came in, to determine whatever remaining doubt there might be as to Mary's fate the night before, but for the moment he changed his mind, called

for the horse he had bought the day before to replace the dead one, and galloped towards Chosen Forest.

The note itself was as follows,—

"I have appointed Friday at four o'clock. He cannot come to-day. C. F——"

It was dated the week before Anthony's journey to London, and was addressed to Williams. Now Anthony knew Mrs. Fraser's writing at a glance; he remembered that such an appointment as was referred to had been made with himself, and till this moment he had not the slightest notion that Williams had ever seen or corresponded with Mrs. Fraser. To find her writing confidentially about himself to a man whom he had believed his friend, and who had proved his worst and most designing enemy, and to remember at the same time that neither Mrs. Fraser nor Williams had ever hinted to him their knowledge of each other, was enough indeed to startle and bewilder him. He followed his first impulse, which was to seek an immediate explanation at the Chancery House.

He hardly knew what he sought or how any explanation could advantage him; but, in truth, since the belief that Mary had destroyed herself fastened on his mind, an indefinite fear lest he had been wrong altogether in condemning her, had been creeping up beside it. The words of her last note to him, "I am innocent," seemed like the solemn declaration of the dying, and every new discovery led up to the notion that a conspiracy had been on foot against his own domestic peace, and that Mary's part in it might have been that of the victim only.

The Chancery House was soon in sight. The sky was clear, the larch woods already green, the ground sweet with violets and starry with anemones. The stream ran laughing; light flashed over its surface; the fish played under it and the flies above it. Anthony looked round with his fevered eyes and chafed against the joy of nature. It was made for creatures of another destiny, and had no sympathy for him. He crossed the bridge; turned into the private path; dismounted at the door. His knocking

brought no answer. He tried the latch and the windows, but all were fastened and the blinds were down. Going back impatiently to the other side of the building, he inquired of the farming people whether their lodger was from home. Oh, yes; she had left altogether, three days ago. Anthony asked where she had gone to; when she was to return; why she had left? He could get no information. Vexed and astonished, he insisted on going into her rooms. They made no objection, and he examined everything. The furniture was left as usual, but the drawers were empty. There were no papers, or anything to indicate an intention of returning. She had gone away on foot, they said, and her servant with the luggage had followed her in a carriage immediately after.

Anthony rode back, under the green larches, over the violets and anemones, by the flashing and laughing water. He rode first to the police-office to ask whether any trace of Mary had been discovered; asking hopelessly, and receiving the usual answer without surprise, for since the

vain efforts that had been made to find the body of his child, he felt as if the things most precious to him were destined to be snatched away in mystery and heard of no more. When he entered the Bank parlor, however, he stopped with a sudden exclamation and immediately shut the door. Richard Hathorne was there, and was waiting for him. Hathorne was a tall, thin, quiet man, a good deal older than his sister. He looked careworn, dusty and ill, but his eyes were bright and steady when he looked at Anthony. They stood on the rug facing one another. Anthony spoke first.—

"You have come, sir!"

"I received your letter, Mr. Forrest."

"You have come too late, sir."

"I have travelled day and night."

"I doubt, sir, whether you have had occasion."

"I come from France, Mr. Forrest; if I am too late to save your wife, I am in time to do her justice."

"Sir, you have robbed me of her. Her shame,

her death, and my own destruction lie at your door."

"I come, Mr. Forrest, prepared to hear this and to deny it. Waiting for you, I have been told briefly what has occurred. If nothing but my own character were at stake I should not intrude upon you. You have lost one of the purest beings in the world, and it is enough for one day's trouble."

"Keep your lips from lying, Mr. Hathorne: at least over my Mary's grave."

"You charge me with a great crime, Mr. Forrest."

"I charge you, sir, with having concealed yourself in my wife's chamber on Thursday night, eight days ago."

"On Thursday night I was on the coast of France."

"You had better prove it, sir."

"I will."

"You shall, then."

"This moment, Mr. Forrest."

"Ay, sir, or never."

"Look at that passport. Observe the *visa*. It is dated that very day."

Anthony looked, and staggered. The proof was official and undeniable. The whole charge, so far as it rested on the events of that mysterious night, was nothing but a fabrication.

"Is this a forgery?" he said, vacantly.

"You are a banker; you ought to know."

"I do know. You have cleared yourself from that charge. I have to beg your pardon. Oh, Mary!"

"Your letter, Mr. Forrest, the letter which brought me here, was written on Wednesday. There must, therefore, have been other grounds for your accusation."

"There were other grounds."

"Then state them."

"Sir, they cannot all be stated, but you shall answer a few questions in a few words."

"Few or many I shall answer them.

"Then listen. Did you see Mrs. Forrest on the day you left Porchester for France?"

"Certainly, I saw her."

"You confess it?"

"Of course I do."

"She came to take leave of you?"

"Undoubtedly."

"She came to console you?"

"She did, sir."

"And what, sir, was the nature of that consolation?"

"She came, Mr. Forrest, to tell me that notwithstanding my own ruin my sister was provided for. She came to explain the generous conduct of Mr. Daniel Hobbes; and, better still, to assure me before I went on my doubtful and melancholy journey, that Lucy was likely to marry her benefactor."

"You shall answer another question. Who told you the Bridge Hill property was for sale?"

"I never heard of it before."

"Stop, sir, you go too far. Do you expect me to believe you?"

"My word, Mr. Forrest, has never been doubted hitherto."

"You are a bankrupt, sir, and you have failed disreputably."

"I have been foolish, and I have failed, but my creditors will lose nothing by my failure."

"A promise, sir, made by every rascal who expects to pay a shilling in the pound."

"My losses, Mr. Forrest, have been heavy, but my debts will be paid in full. I have been the victim of a gang of swindlers who have ruined me, and who nearly carried off their spoil. My rapid journey to France has to a great extent defeated their plans. Look at these documents."

Anthony glanced at the papers offered to him, and as he did so his head bent forward again with the haggard look of weariness and age. They showed Hathorne to have been in all respects an honorable man.

"What's this?" he cried, pointing to a name. It was the name of the London agent employed by the spendthrift lord.

"That man," replied Hathorne, "is one of the gang who have defrauded me; I discovered that on my journey. I have also discovered that he

has had a friend, perhaps an accomplice, in Porchester. He has corresponded with Mr. Owen Williams."

"Oh, my Mary!" Anthony dropped the papers and hid his face. Richard Hathorne guiltless, and Williams the friend and correspondent of both the London agent and Mrs Fraser! At last the light broke upon him; darkly, like the sun in storms, but with the same assurance of it's being there.

"Oh, my Mary!"

Richard Hathorne could not understand the course of Anthony's thoughts or the way in which what he had said affected him.

"I trust I am acquitted," he said, gravely. Anthony held out his hand.

"Perhaps I may leave you, Mr. Forrest? I have not yet seen my sister."

"Go, sir; and pardon me if you can."

Richard Hathorne had scarcely gone, when a note marked "Private," and left by a postilion at the Bank, was brought in to Anthony. The sight of it roused him again to frenzy. It was from Owen Williams.

"You have got your wife again, and she is innocent. If you want proof or explanation, meet me in Devil's Hollow at seven o'clock this evening. If you are afraid to meet me alone again, stay where you are, for no one but yourself will find me.

"OWEN WILLIAMS."

Anthony read it twice and then tore it into shreds.

"Afraid! you scoundrel. Afraid! you coward. Oh, Mary! I am past either hope or fear, but I will have you justified."

He looked at his watch. It was four o'clock and they were closing the Bank doors. He sat down at his desk and rang his hand-bell. They brought letters and other papers for his signature, and he signed them. He went out, to urge on the fruitless search again, and returned, to go up-stairs and spend half an hour alone in Mary's room. When he came down the servants told him their ghost-story. He laughed at them, and bade them think of their lost mistress as a saint in Paradise, not noticing their looks of surprise. Finally he took out his pistols, loaded them, and

put them in his pockets. It was half-past six o'clock. He went down to the stable where his horse was again in waiting, and once more rode down the High Street and round the fatal corner of the Bridge Hill.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BRIDGE HILL.

In the twilight, before the stars were seen, Owen Williams crossed among the gorse bushes towards the silent quarry. He did not come from Porchester, but from a village several miles south of the town, the quarry lying between them. He came in a carriage, with a pair of fresh horses, which he left in the road a little way off, where it was out of sight. In appearance he was considerably changed. His eyes were bloodshot, his cold, calculating face had become flushed and angry; his hands had lost their steadiness and trembled. He was a desperate and reckless man.

He limped a good deal, and often cursed his foot as he dragged it painfully along. He had a parcel in his hand, which he clutched firmly

and seemed afraid to lose, though it encumbered him. At the brink of the quarry he looked about him anxiously, and seeing no one, descended into it and made his way through the narrow cutting into Devil's Hollow. Once in, he seemed partially relieved. He sat down on a fragment of rock and drew his hand across his eyes.

"I'll divorce her yet!" he muttered. He opened the parcel, which proved to be a case of large double-barrelled pistols. He took them both out; laid them on his knee and put the box aside. He examined the locks; took the ramrods out and pushed them down the barrels, to assure himself that his weapons were loaded. After doing this twice, he seemed to lose confidence and nervously drew the charge of one of the barrels. The ball was there, and the powder. He put them back again, ramming very tight and again examining the locks. Then he levelled at the stones, his finger on the trigger and his arm stretched out; and because the pistol shook he cursed his arm, and tried with compressed lips and bent eyebrows to make it firmer. Having suc-

ceeded to some extent he looked at his watch, and seeing that it was nearly seven o'clock, he put a pistol in each of his coat pockets with his hands still on them, and got up from his seat, and in spite of his lameness limped up and down in the hollow, looking always at the narrow entrance or at the edge of the cutting overhead.

The night was very still and he heard a church clock strike the hour. He paused and listened keenly for a footstep on the grass or a voice calling for him. There was no other sound but the distant bell, and when it ceased, all was silent. Williams listened for full five minutes; then he walked slowly into the larger quarry, and seeing no one, stopped in a shadowy place, once more levelled one of his pistols at some object near him, and smiled because his hand was like a rock again.

"Three yards," he muttered. "Safe at three yards," and he measured the distance with his strides. Listening again he grew impatient.

"D—n him! Is he afraid?"

He stole up the path leading from above into

the quarry and looked round in all directions. Nothing could be seen but the gorse bushes, the fading twilight, and the few stars, tremulous and pale.

"He'll come. I know him. He'll come to collar me and fight me. But perhaps—!" and he clicked the lock of one of his pistols. "They'll track me by the letter. No. He'll have it in his pocket."

He descended again and went back to Devil's Hollow. But the stars grew brighter and no one came. The distant bell struck eight and he was still alone. The twilight turned to darkness; the air was cold. Shadows seemed to fill the hollow and when, listening and trembling, he walked over a heap of refuse, there was a skeleton rattle among the stones. He uttered a hasty malediction and left the quarry. He crossed again among the gorse bushes, and found his carriage where he had left it.

"Drive to Porchester. To the Four All's," he said, as he got in and pulled down the blinds.

Mr. Fowkes was smoking his evening pipe among a crowd of gossips busy with some interesting news when Owen summoned him to the door of his carriage.

"Where's that letter, Fowkes?"

"Sent at four o'clock."

"Confound you; you've forgotten it."

"Go and see."

"Has he left home then?"

"I should say so."

"Where's he gone to?"

"Gone after the missis."

"After her? d—n her; where's that?"

Fowkes slowly took his hand from his pipe and pointed with his thumb downwards.

"Speak out, man; the devil take your fingers."

"Mrs. Forrest's been and drowned herself, and Mr. Forrest's been killed on the Bridge Hill!"

On the morning of that day, Mr. Hornbeam had received private intelligence that the London agent with whom he, on behalf of the secret committee of his party, believed that the terms of

purchase for the Bridge Hill property were arranged, had suddenly absconded, taking all his papers with him, in consequence of discoveries which Hathorne's journey to France had brought to light. Mr. Hornbeam had prided himself greatly on the successful issue of this affair, supposing that he had outwitted Mr. Forrest and defeated his secret plans, and his disgust was violent in proportion when he found his bargain so abruptly broken off at the very moment of its completion. Failing to find sufficient solace in the use of bad language at home, he took a drive in the afternoon to some tea-gardens on the road to the quarry. There he got very drunk, swore his horse was the son of a cameleopard and could trot thirty miles an hour, and having laid a wager that he would prove it on his way home, he got into his gig and went off at a round gallop, shouting lustily and applying his whip with great vigor alternately to the sides of his beast and the backs of imaginary boys behind him. In this condition, between six and seven o'clock, he drove up the steep Bridge Hill, when Anthony, equally

reckless from a different cause, was coming sharply round the corner. The foot-passengers stopped with a warning cry. Mr. Hornbeam pulled at his reins, but gave so loud a shout that the beast sprang forward in alarm. Anthony, blind with passion, saw nothing and did not even draw his bridle. In a moment his horse lay in a pool of blood, with the gig shaft deep in his chest and his rider on the pavement. What became of Mr. Hornbeam nobody knew. He was found at home, however, next morning with a cut on his forehead, and no distinct notion as to how he got it. Anthony was severely hurt, and was for some time believed to have been killed. He was carried home and laid, not in Mary's chamber, for he had locked the door of it and taken away the key, but in a room adjoining. When he came to himself his recollection was perfect, and when he saw the faces of those about him and found at first that he was unable to speak, he believed that he was dying.

"Send some one to her father," was the first sentence he contrived to utter. Lucy Hathorne,

who was nearest to him turned to Mr. Hobbes, who also was in the room, and whispered something. He smiled tearfully, and bowed his head in assent. The surgeon had just left the bedside after making the first hasty examination. Daniel Hobbes went up to him.

"Is it fatal?" he asked in a low voice.

"It may be; but he will live some days."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, humanly speaking."

"God bless you, my dear fellow; God bless you!"

Hobbes went up to Anthony and took his hand.

"My dear friend, the news may be distressing to Mr. Griffiths. If you please I shall be myself the bearer—myself the bearer."

"You are kind. I believe he has heard nothing. Not even about the boy."

"The first coach, my dear Mr. Anthony; the first coach to-night."

"Take post-horses—there's my purse. Do as I say. I have little breath to urge with. Tell

him she was innocent; that I knew it before I died."

"God bless me! my good sir; my news is better than I thought."

Anthony closed his eyes. "Good bye," he said, faintly, pressing his old friend's hand. And Mr. Hobbes, after a short farewell from Lucy, hurried off, and was quickly on his road to Wales. Anthony fell back exhausted when he was gone. This matter disposed of, the surgeon was prescribing perfect quietness and ordering everyone from the room, but Anthony, rousing himself again, recalled them, and insisted on having pen and paper brought to him. With great difficulty he wrote a cheque on his own bank, and signed it.

"Come here," he said to Lucy. "Take this, for Mary's sake. It is your wedding portion. You can use it as you please."

Lucy took it, and kissed the hand that gave it. "For Mary's sake," she said, and his look thanked her. It was not till some hours after that she read the figures, and found the cheque to be

for a sum large enough to reinstate her brother in his business. This done, Anthony clasped his hands together and seemed to resign himself to his condition.

"Now let me go to her," he said to the surgeon when the room was clear.

"There is a time to die, and we may not hasten it," was the grave answer. Anthony was silent, and the surgeon gave such directions as appeared necessary to those who were to be left in charge of his patient.

CHAPTER XIX.

SUNSET.

That fatal Friday had been an eventful day in Wales. It was a beautiful and early spring, but snow had fallen on the mountains unexpectedly the night before, and the shepherds were anxious about their flocks, which had been driven higher than usual with their new-born offspring. John Griffiths woke very early in the morning and dressed in haste. He looked serene but grave; and his eyes seemed, as was not unfrequently the case with them, to be gazing placidly but with a tender longing on something that was far away.

"I've had a dream," he said, speaking to his wife, who still lay bed-ridden and had aged exceedingly since the first news of Mary's sorrow. "I've been hearing a young lamb crying. It

wasn't nigh me, and it wasn't far off neither, but for all my listening I could not tell where to go. But I thought it called me, and it was the sweetest cry ever was heard. And then it seemed like as if it was nowhere but in my own heart, and I thought it was one of the lambs of Paradise, and the Good Shepherd carrying it home."

"You've not been dreaming, John. I've been awake and heard them bleating. Look out of the window. I think it's cold. Maybe there's a fall of snow."

"Ay, mother, thou'rt right. It's come on the hills and they're as white as wool. There'll be a deal to do. Mayhap thou'll not see any more of me till eventide."

"My heart's sore, John, about Mary. She should have sent us a letter. It's Friday, and there's no word of her yet."

"She's waiting, mother; she's waiting. Mayhap she'll not write till he that can prove her honest has come home."

"It's hard to wait," said the poor mother.

"The Lord knows it's hard," he answered,

gazing far into the unknown distance and smiling like an infant on its mother's arm.

"You 've a better trust than I have, John; a deal better."

"Nay, mother, I 'm a poor creature, and my heart's like to break for Mary. But it's best to be patient. They 've had to wait for her in Heaven, this many a year."

He made her comfortable on her pillows, bade the servant-girl be kind to her, took his breakfast in his hand, and went out to join the other farmers of the village, who were already astir and hurrying up the hill-sides. Many a little lamb was saved, many a bleating ewe comforted. Some, flying from the snow, had climbed along the sides of precipices and found refuge on narrow ledges whence return was impossible, and where help could only reach them in the difficult and dangerous way by which, on bluff and rocky coasts, men seek for samphire or the nests of eagles. The sun became hot and the snow soon melted, but it was late in the afternoon before the shepherds were satisfied that all not hope-

lessly lost had been recovered. When the rest turned wearily home, John Griffiths still kept listening.

"There's another," he said; "there's another; it's far up, but I hear it crying." His companions listened also, but could hear nothing. They went with him for some distance, tired as they were. "I hear it," he kept repeating. "It's a young lamb; it's very lonesome; it's far away." They tried to persuade him he was mistaken, but he only said, "It's crying," and went on. At last they turned back, certain that he was wrong. He bade them tell his wife he was going higher up the mountain, and still followed where his ear or his fancy guided, over the wet bogs, through the lengthening shadow of the rocks, across the white waterfalls and the remaining drifts of snow.

That evening, a little before sunset, a passenger got down from one of the Chester coaches at the spot where John Griffiths had sat waiting a week before, which was the point in the mail road nearest to the top of the pass. It was Mary.

She left her home the night before with her mind distraught, her self-possession gone, her reason all disordered for the time, but with no thought of suicide or of any kind of refuge except her God and her earthly father. She crossed the crowded Market Place unnoticed in her peasant's dress, and walked as fast as she could along the road to Wales. When, an hour or two afterwards, a coach passed her going in the same direction, she stopped it, and took her seat upon it, being taken for a Welsh servant going home. At Chester she fell asleep over her breakfast and the first coach went without her, so that when she got down at last within a few miles of her native village, she saw the sun before her only a little way above the great peaks of the mountain, whose masses hung in crag and precipice over the head of the pass. The sun had set when she turned between those frowning buttresses to descend through the gloom and desolation by the narrow pathway leading downwards towards the valley beyond.

Her road hitherto had been an ascending one; by little lakes and pastures, fresh at first, but grow-

ing brown and barren as she went higher. The cattle lay no longer in the sun; the rude stone bridges stood darkly over gloomy waters; the mountain was a black and awful shape under the yellow sky. White sparry lines, and snowdrifts here and there among the crags, looked pale and ghostly. Cold gusts of wind started from the mountain chasms, flapping her dress about her and shaking the thin grass and the rushes.

The rushes were left behind; there was little of the thin grass even when the pass was entered, only the tremendous ruins torn by time from the mountain sides, and the jagged rocks towering above them. Mary stopped there, faint and panting. The desolate and lonely silence of the place appalled her. There was no torrent there. The springs that fed it rose in the boggy soil under the cataracts of stones, but their waters crept down slowly and stealthily, and the roar of their after-course never reached the summit of the pass. She felt the chilling wind and saw the darkness falling. She looked with startled eyes down the long, irregular and grim defile. The village could not be

seen, a bluff rock hid it; but she saw the Spirit of the place, and his habitation, and felt the terror of his coming by. Down on the right, on nights like this, in the dusky shadow, among the toppling columns, a castle stood. Battlements and towers of solemn gray were twined with withered ivy and loopholed among the leaves. The long lines of the heavy buttresses were, as it were, furrows in the wall, and round them now, flying low and croaking, a raven passed slowly and returned. The wind blew over the turrets, and the unseen warder sounded his invisible horn. The light grew fainter, and the shadowy drawbridge fell. It fell from the gaunt black portal to the pathway leading up towards Mary as she stood and saw it, and out of the heavy gloom behind came the Giant Despair.

But Mary shrieked and fled from him; fled as she had never done before. On her left the precipices were at some distance, and between them and the path was a wild and rugged space, rising towards them and nearly covered with broken fragments and enormous boulders. She fled

amongst them, running with outspread arms and streaming hair, and shrieking as she went, "Father! Father!"

John Griffiths had climbed higher up the mountain after the lost lamb which was never to be found. He was on the edge of a dreadful precipice when Mary's cry came up from the pass below. He heard, and stopped with a foreboding hush. He listened, and raised his hands to heaven. He looked with such keen vision as is given to love's agony alone, and saw through the dusk and among the deceiving colors of the rocks, a flying form, which he knew was Mary. He looked down the precipice: even his shepherd's feet had never tried that terrible descent. He put his hands to his mouth and drew breath till he could draw no more, and called till he could prolong the sound no longer.

It was in vain. He was too far above her and she too wild. He saw her rushing blindly to a spot where she might be dashed to pieces. He did not hesitate. He did not even pause to pray. He dropped from crag to crag down the side of the

precipice; from crag to crag where hardly the wild-goats ventured, and he saved his child. He said nothing when he flung his arms about her, and she, with only a momentary flash of recognition in her eyes, fell silent and insensible. He took her up. He was trembling with exhaustion, and it was a long way home, but he carried her there. He carried her to her mother's bed, laid her in her mother's arms, and swooned away.

Mrs. Griffiths had been in bed for weeks, unable to raise herself and not expecting to walk again. She got up without assistance, however, and, with an appearance of almost supernatural strength, laid Mary on the bed, lifted her husband from the floor, called help, and applied restoratives. John soon returned to consciousness, and was immediately on his feet.

"My lamb's come home," he said. He did not seem to notice his wife's strange activity. It seemed a matter of course, with Mary lying helpless in the room. He told how he had found her. They observed the dress she wore and the wild expression of her face, and shook their gray heads

sadly over her, waiting for some fearful story when she should wake again. Her first words were delirious. She talked of a spectral castle, a croaking raven, and a Giant Despair. But towards the early morning, in the hour when fever ebbs again, and sleep falls gentlest upon restless eyes, and the terrors of the dark are ended, she fell into a short quiet silence, and looked up from it smiling and in her right mind. Then all the story was told, from the loss of the little child on Tuesday afternoon to her own flight from Porchester. She slept afterwards, though not very long, while her parents watched her and spoke in low whispers about her trouble. When Mary woke she got up from the bed. "Lie still, lass, lie still," said the mother, but she persisted.

"I'm not ill," she said, "only tired, and I must go back again. It was wrong to leave my husband."

"Nay, Mary, you'd cause enough."

"Indeed, mother, it was wrong. I was not quite myself or I should have had more patience. If I had waited he might have seen me."

"He 's cast you off, child."

"No; he thinks I have forsaken him, and he has had some reason."

"She's in the right, mother," said John. "She'd best have stayed."

After much discussion it was decided that Mary should rest at home that day, and that on the day following her father should take her back to Porchester, give Anthony the true account of her journey with Owen Williams, and make a final effort to convince him of her innocence. When this was settled, and Mary, though very pale and tremulous, was moving about in her usual way, Mrs. Griffiths, sinking back in her chair, looked down at her own feet and then in her husband's face.

"They've done their work, John. It's all over with them. You may put me into bed again."

Mary looked alarmed, and became still more so when her father, putting his arms round his wife and trying to lift her as usual, turned suddenly pale and set her down again in her chair.

"Somehow I've lost my strength, mother."

Mary came anxiously to help him, and both together managed, not without difficulty, to lay her on her pillows.

"We 're pretty well worn out," she said, cheerfully, taking John by the hand, "but if the Lord spares us to see Mary righted, it wont matter."

John looked before him. "I 'm not afraid, mother; I 'm not afraid," and he sat down, for he was giddy.

Daniel Hobbes had joyfully obeyed Anthony's desire and taken post-horses instead of coming by the coach. He travelled all night and was in the village about ten o'clock on Saturday morning, while Anthony's letter, written on Thursday, had not even yet arrived. Not wishing to give alarm he stopped the chaise, and walking to John Griffiths' cottage, was himself struck with astonishment, for he met Mary in the porch.

"Lord bless me, Mrs. Forrest! why, my dear madam, in flesh and blood, I declare!"

"You've come to look for me, Mr. Hobbes?"

"Not the least in the world. We've been looking for you in the river, with what success it is unnecessary for me to detail."

"In the river!"

"Your departure was most mysterious. You had, so to speak, vanished—vanished, my dear Mrs. Forrest, and to all appearance with garments quite insufficient for terrestrial habitations. The inference was that, unhappily led astray by grief, you must be looked for in another element."

"And did they believe that of me?"

"Not all; not all. Miss Lucy and myself have been persistent, I may say obstinately heterodox, in denying the opinion of the majority."

"And my husband?"

"Dear lady, I must both gratify you and distress you; my news is both sweet and bitter; Mr. Anthony is a great invalid, a great invalid."

"Hush, don't deceive me, what is it? Is he alive?"

"Surely; surely."

Mary seized his hand and leant upon it, shaking hysterically.

"Poor thing! poor thing!"

"Don't stop to pity me; tell me all about it; quick."

"He had an accident last evening on the Bridge Hill."

"Oh, mercy!"

"He was much hurt, but he may recover."

"He may! You mean he cannot!"

"God forbid; God forbid! I have the surgeon's assurance that the case is not necessarily fatal."

"Oh, let me go to him. Will he let me? Will he see me?"

"There, my dear madam, is all the pleasure of my news. He is undeceived; he is satisfied; he calls you what the angels do; he says you are innocent."

Mary heard the last word and threw herself into her old friend's arms. In a few minutes he took her into the cottage an altered being; fragile but radiant; half-fainting, but with her youth restored.

The intelligence brought by Mr. Hobbes was soon explained, and it was not long before he,

with Mary and her father, was riding back post-haste to Porchester. Mary had desired to return with Hobbes alone; she feared so greatly for her mother, and saw so plainly that Mrs. Griffiths herself believed she was on her dying bed. But the old lady put an end to the controversy by a strong assertion of her own will, and an assurance that she should die at once of her anxieties if her Mary went back without her father. So a daily letter was promised by one of the neighbours who could write it best, in case Mrs. Griffiths were herself unable, and the shepherd once more left the valley with his suffering but happy child.

CHAPTER XX.

PLEIADES.

It was settled on Saturday morning that Anthony would recover, but that his hurt, which was chiefly in the chest, must take away his power of speaking in public and leave him probably a shattered life, fit only for retirement and repose. Towards evening, however, the doctor changed his tone of confidence for one of apprehension. His patient's state was worse than the apparent consequences of the fall accounted for, and he began to fear some unseen injury of a more fatal kind. The injury was indeed unseen, and, in its nature, worse than mortal. It was the remorse of a strong, wilful, earnest spirit, struck down and humbled, convinced of sin, hopeless of reparation. It was the thought of Mary—passionately loved,

wrongfully doubted, cruelly cast away. It was the clear consciousness that if he had been the fool of circumstance, his own errors had given circumstance its power, and that a little more trust and confidence, a little less ambition and vanity, would have made life a palace instead of a ruin, and marriage its holiest joy instead of its worst temptation.

He passed from grief to agony and from agony into delirium. In this, though he never ceased to heap reproaches on himself, there was a slight abatement of his previous despair. He lost the notion that Mary had drowned herself, and spoke of her only as having been driven away by his unkindness; as living, though lost to him. Sometimes he called her in tones that made the hearers weep, and sometimes in a voice that startled them, it was at once so hopeless and so daring.

Very early on Sunday morning, when the first daylight began to glimmer over the Borough Wall, there was the sound of carriage wheels passing through the sleeping town. Anthony had been growing quieter for some time. When he

heard the sound he closed his eyes, said there was angels' music in the Market Place, and fell asleep.

In a few minutes Mary was satnding at his bedside. She had come in with a noiseless step and was perfectly calm. She put her lips once to his hot forehead, and seeing that it did not wake him, took off her shawl and bonnet and asked a few whispered questions of the attendants, who had been called out of the room and quietly told of her safety and return before she entered.

"Now leave me here," she said.

They made some opposition; he might wake, and seeing her, be startled dangerously.

"No," she said, "he has been calling for me. I have come. Leave us alone."

They obeyed her. When the room was clear she got on the bed beside him, and sat there, and with her tender and soothing hands raised his head softly and slowly, and laid it on her bosom. He did not wake. His sleep grew natural and profound. She felt the throbbing of his temples lessening hour by hour as he slept on the living

pillow she had given him. The light stole up. The lilacs were in blossom on the Borough Wall. The ash-trees were already budding. The warm and pleasant sun woke the world. When the church bells began to chime he moved a little, and when the full peal was ringing he opened his eyes. Her face was bent over them. He did not start or seem surprised, but looked at her drowsily under his eyelids.

"Are you come from the river?"

"Oh, no, dearest."

He put up his hand and touched her cheek with it.

"Wet—wet. But I thought the water was cold."

"Hush, love. Sleep again."

"Wedding bells?" he asked, listening.

"Ours, dearest."

He saw the bracelet on her arm; the one she had taken with her; the first he gave her; touched it, looked at it, turned to her face again:

"My Mary!"

When the surgeon came shortly afterwards

he found Anthony still lying on his wife's bosom, with red eyes and other marks of recent agitation, but with the fever gone and his mind quite collected. Mary left him for a little time to change her dress again. He had told her where to find the key of her own room, and when she went into it and found everything as she had left it three days before, the recollection of the past overpowered her enforced calmness, and her husband sent for her impatiently before she was ready to return. His message, however, was her best restorative. To be missed, to be needful to him, to feel the old love in his words and the blessing of the time to come!

If he lived; ah! only if he lived! But she met the surgeon, and heard there was no more reason for anxiety.

John Griffiths was not allowed to see Anthony that day, and he spent his time chiefly by the river, having a hope that he might find the body of the child. Mary did not leave her husband while he was absent, and indeed there was enough to talk of for a longer day than any April one.

Anthony would not wait. His sole desire that day was to tell her every particular of his own conduct and of the feelings by which he had become estranged from her. When he first mentioned Mrs. Fraser's name his voice faltered.

"Oh! Mary, I must try your faith; I must make you doubt me."

She took his hand and smiled.

"Dearest, I know her story."

He almost sprang from his bed.

"You know it!"

"It was the one secret I never told. You knew I had one."

He fell back astounded.

"And you knew the whole, and that I had loved her?"

"Not so. It was a nameless legend till last Wednesday afternoon. Listen, love: you have talked too much. Let me make my own confession."

She told him the story, and the use Williams had made of it in order to destroy her confidence

in her husband. Anthony's face burned with shame.

"Can you ever forget those facts, those letters, that clandestine intercourse? Can you ever trust me as a faithful husband, Mary?"

She kissed his lips and smoothed his forehead.

"Dear love, I have never doubted."

Her words were like nectar in a cup of fire. He felt the endless blessing and the indelible reproach. Oh! if his faith had been like hers.

"I was wrong," she said. "I ought not to have made that promise. I ought not to have known anything that I could not tell you. It seemed so valueless, and yet, if I had told you, everything might have been changed. I think such promises must be wrong always, for we are mortal, and very blind."

In the course of the day Anthony asked Mary whether it would grieve her to leave Porchester. He felt that his public life was over, and the loss of their child had changed everything at home. He longed to cut off all associations with the events of the past year, and he proposed to leave the Bank

to his partner and retire, for some time at least, to Mary's native valley in Wales. Mary's feelings were not the same; her heart clung to everything that had once been Tony's; her griefs had come so fast upon her that in the general tempest she had scarcely realized the certainty of his loss, and to leave the home where he had lived, and go childless to another habitation was to put the final seal to the fatal story. But she looked at her husband's face and saw his suffering written in it, and she consented. Mr. Griffiths approved the plan. So did old Mrs. Forrest, whose health was half renewed by her joy at her son's safety and Mary's restoration, and who suggested that Anthony should build a cottage for his own residence and another for herself, and that they should settle thus among the mountains. The doctor decided that Anthony might be removed in a few days and that the change was likely to be the best thing for his health. They waited anxiously for the post next morning; but as it brought a favorable account of Mrs. Griffiths' state, John stayed contentedly at Porchester, still very anxious to satisfy

himself further as to the loss of his little grandchild. He made a number of inquiries, and heard at last the story told by Betsy the nursemaid about the reputed ghost. He got hold of Betsy's cousin and questioned him; not, however, with any particular result. He certified to the appearance of the two women in black, one of whom was doubtless Mary, while the other, in the opinion of this gallant lover, was as like a spirit as anything else. Now John had an undoubting belief in spiritual things, but none at all in any spirits of evil; and, always thinking the best the likeliest, he inferred at once when he heard this story, not that a ghost had interfered to kill the child, but that the report about the gipsies was in some way true and that the boy was stolen. Mary caught eagerly at the idea again, notwithstanding her former terrible disappointment, and somewhat strengthened it in her father's mind by relating the manner in which Williams had persisted in saying that he could find the child. Anthony thought the hope a visionary one, till he was reminded that the fruitless search for Mary's body had

ended in her reappearance, alive and well, and that in the other case every effort had been equally fruitless.

John Griffiths took his hat and staff and went again to the Borough Wall meadow on Monday afternoon. Mary watched him anxiously, he seemed to walk so feebly, but he himself thought only of his errand. At the back of the ruins he found the large nail in the palings, and soon satisfied himself that the child might have climbed over with its help. Down the precipitous bank, too, nearly in a line with this spot, the little hat was still hanging on the gorse bush, for no one had ventured down to fetch it. To John, however, the descent was easy. He rescued the hat, and getting down to the edge of the water found that it was deep there and the current strong. He was not satisfied, nevertheless. So he climbed up again and carefully examined the ground above and the circuit of the Borough Wall. Coming through the hawthorn bushes at the end of it he observed the entrance into Prisoner's Hole. The sun, already in the west, shone into it. He

entered; saw something shining on the ground and picked it up. It was a large key, thrown there, it would seem, by some one anxious to get rid of it. He put it in his pocket and stepped forward. Feeling the sharp turning in the passage with his hands, he groped his way round it, found a level floor before him with his staff, and, caring nothing for the darkness, went on, step by step, surprised by his discovery. When he had gone perhaps fifty paces with constantly increasing astonishment, his eye caught the glimmer of sunlight from the other end, as Mrs. Fraser's had done before.

"It 's a wonder they never thought of it," said John; and stopping when he had gone a little further into the light he looked down closely at the floor. There was a slight sprinkling of sand from the rock upon it, and in the sand were footmarks, turned in both directions, but all like those of a woman, and all of the same size. He went on carefully, stooping and looking, but found nothing else till near the bottom of the passage, where he picked up a little basket tied with

cherry-red ribbons. Coming out among the caverns by the water side, he lost the footmarks in the low meadow, and went back to the Bank with news of what he had discovered. Anthony was sitting up in his room and Mary with him when John Griffiths entered with his trophies. Mary caught at the hat and the little basket. "The child's!" she said, taking them from him.

"Dost know the basket, lass?"

"Yes, anywhere. I bought it for him. He had it when he was lost."

"Then the Lord be praised, for he'll be found again."

"Are they still searching? The basket has not been in the river?"

"No; nor the child neither."

"Father!"

"It's true. He's been run off with."

"Oh, Anthony!"

"Mr. Griffiths, I fear you are deceived."

"No, Mr. Forrest, I'm not deceived. He's been taken off by a strange way under ground."

"Prisoner's Hole!" cried Mary and Anthony together.

"Ay; I've heard they call it so."

"It has been blocked up for many years," said Anthony.

"Then they've cleared it," John replied, "for I've been down myself from the Borough Wall to the river and come out in the caverns."

"Is that possible?"

"There's a woman's footmarks in it, and the basket was a long way down, nigh the lower end."

They were astounded, but the story of the gipsies seemed confirmed at last, and with its confirmation came the hope that Tony might be recovered. John produced the key he had found, and on seeing it Mary was struck with its resemblance to that of the outer garden door. She went to fetch the true key; this was a facsimile of it. It appeared to have been recently made, and not to have been used much, from the marks of the file upon it. This discovery threw a new and strange light on the affair in the garden.

The idea of thieves had long been set aside as inadmissible. There was a plot somewhere, and this might have been one of its branches. Some one had thought it worth while to get a duplicate key, and for some other object than that of robbery. The gardener being closely questioned, remembered that he generally left the key in the door till evening, and that the door was sometimes left open in the daytime; and, moreover, that a month or two before, he had missed the key one day when his mistress was out; had intended to ask her whether she had taken it; but had found it a few hours afterwards lying at the foot of the door. On further inquiry in the town, a locksmith was produced, who stated that about the time indicated by the gardener, a key of this description was brought to him, a duplicate was required in a couple of hours, the key and the duplicate were taken away together, and the man who brought and fetched them was Mr. Owen Williams. Moreover, on again inspecting the conservatory, it was found that the broken panes were such as could be struck from below

by a tall man with a stick in his hand, that the glass had fallen in a direction consistent with this idea, and that the boughs of the apple-tree beyond the reach of a man's arm were none of them broken. The size of the foot-prints was the remaining difficulty. They were still visible on the beds, and were much too large for Williams; but enough had been found out to satisfy everyone that the whole affair was part of his infamous design.

But Mary felt no great interest in these inquiries. Her husband believed all she said, and she had told him all she knew. Her anxiety was now about her boy. She scarcely dared to hope, but at all events hope was possible. Fresh communications were made with the police. Gipsies had certainly been seen at the fair. It was advertised that the child had been stolen, and a large reward was offered for his recovery and the apprehension of the guilty parties. At the same time a little patience was recommended by the legal authorities. Supposing Williams' statement to be true, it was probable that the child

was already out of England, and that before long some proposal or other would be made for his ransom by the speculators on his father's wealth and affection.

In a day or two, Anthony being able to see his friends, Mr. Hobbes and Lucy were admitted into his room. Mr. Hobbes had an old piece of paper in his hand, and a twinkle in his eye which showed he was eager to make a communication.

"What is it, Hobbes?" Anthony asked, looking at the paper, as soon as the first necessary questions had been asked and answered, and Lucy had sat down by Mary's side, with her arm round her.

"Ah! my dear Mr. Anthony, a great discovery and a heavy disappointment: a triumph and a defeat; a new road to truth, and a dead wall in the middle of it! This morning I found the document."

"What?—the paper you've been hunting for these years and years?"

"The very same, the key to the whole controversy. The PORTICEASTER document."

"You don't say so? What! with the name so spelt?"

"Ah! my good sir, fortune is fickle, and time destructive. This precious document, which has escaped moth and mildew and is in other respects most admirably preserved, has fallen in the way of some sacrilegious mouse or vermin of the larger sort, who has doubtless both swallowed and digested the identical letters most essential to the satisfaction of mankind."

"The mountain, then, has been in labor," said Anthony, smiling.

"And the cats have disgraced themselves," replied Hobbes. "Not, however, that all is lost. Of the name of our good town, the only remaining letters are POR at the beginning, and TER at the end, and there is this considerable hole between them. To any unprejudiced mind, however, it is plain on examination and measurement, that the space requires the complete word PORTICEASTER to fill it up, and our doctrine, therefore, obtains a virtual confirmation."

"I'm afraid, Hobbes, it won't settle the controversy or convert Mr. Hornbeam."

"I'm afraid not; I'm afraid not—a thousand pities, but human natures are obstinate, and pigs especially so."

"I also have a document to speak about," said Lucy, blushing and looking at Daniel Hobbes.

"A little restitution to make, Miss Lucy would say," said he. "A matter under the statute of mortmain, though I am not prepared to specify the clause."

"Do explain it for me, Mr. Hobbes. Here is the document."

"And here is the restitution," said Hobbes, taking from her and laying on Anthony's knee the cheque he had given her a few days before.

"This little document, my dear sir, was accepted by Miss Lucy under peculiar circumstances, and in the melancholy expectation of being a mourner at your funeral. Moreover, for Mrs. Forrest's sake; and Mrs. Forrest and yourself being both alive again, and about, as

we happily hope, to be blessed once more with the presence of your son and heir, the conditions of acceptance have altogether vanished, and the only fitting place for the document itself is, in Miss Lucy's judgment and my own, among the ashes of the fire."

"My kind friends," said Anthony, wiping his eyes, "this will not do. You must accept your wedding portion, Lucy. You must not hinder her, Hobbes. If you don't like our obligation, and want to turn it the other way, come to Wales, where we have resolved to go, make your home there beside us, and teach us our valley's pedigree and the private history of the rocks."

"And leave the old Porticus? Leave the Borough Wall to the machinations of its enemies?"

Anthony made no answer. He bowed his head over Mary's hand.

So it was settled at last. Before the end of the week, Anthony and his wife were in the best lodgings that could be had near the cottage

of John Griffiths. They found Mrs. Griffiths much worse than her letters had prepared them for, and saw plainly enough that, as she herself told them, they had come to bury her. But she lingered from day to day, and Mary, in nursing both her husband and her mother, found too much occupation to have time at present for unavailing sorrow.

CHAPTER XXI.

ζ URSÆ MAJORIS.

Near the spot where the mail-coach road approached nearest to the top of the pass, there was a large hotel. It stood almost alone, but was a famous posting-house and was well known to travellers, especially those with whom the joy of life is the death of fishes. In a room in this hotel, looking towards the mountains, Mrs. Fraser sat, on the morning of a day about a week after Mr. and Mrs. Forrest had left Porchester. She looked dreadfully ill and every sound startled her. She had arrived there the night before, and had been all night watching by a bed with close-drawn curtains round it, and ever since sunrise walking from the chamber to her sitting-room and

back again, or gazing with wild eyes at the peaks of the mountains. She was doing this when her Italian maid came in.

"Is he awake?" she said, in an excited voice.

"No, signora; he sleeps like the dead."

"Hush! am I not frightened enough already? Suppose he never wakes again!"

"Shall I wake him, signora?"

"No. I dare not. Such innocent sleep. Oh, Heaven! give it me again!"

"Your scarf, signora?"

"Fool! did I say so? Let me alone."

The maid shrugged her shoulders and left the room. Mrs. Fraser laid her head on the window-sill.

"No child! I never had a child! it might have saved me. Saved me?" she cried, passionately: "God knew it was not worth the while. I am sunk too far. I am worthless, hopeless."

She was startled by a footstep and the closing of the door. Owen Williams stood before her.

"So!" he said, frowning fiercely.

She shrank from him like a withered leaf.

"You see I have found you, madam."

"Oh, mercy!"

"Justice first, and fair dealing. Where's the child?"

"Safe."

"Here?"

"Never mind."

He swore an oath that made her spring to her feet.

"Bring him, I tell you."

"No."

"You dare to beard me, do you? We shall see. What are you going to do with him?"

"To take him home; to give him to his mother."

"I shall save you the trouble."

"You! Owen Williams!"

"I said so, Mrs. Fraser. That is my purpose. That is why I have tracked you and followed you."

"I shall defeat your purpose, then."

"Let me be plain with you, madam. The

boy was stolen, and you stole him. The act was felony, and I can prove the act. It is already advertised."

"You made me do it; you know you made me."

"Where are your witnesses, madam?"

"Wretch! your own conscience."

"Will keep its own counsel. Obey me, Mrs. Fraser, and the boy shall go back to his mother. Resist, and you shall be arrested."

She could not resist. She bent before him, as the reed when the tiger springs.

"What must I do?"

"You must take a message to Mary Griffiths."

"Well!"

"You must tell her the child's here, and he's ill, and can't be moved. You must bring her to him, and remember this, Mrs. Fraser, you must bring her alone."

"Alone!"

"Yes, madam."

"What for?"

"That's my business."

Mrs. Fraser shivered. "She will not come alone."

"She must and shall, madam."

"How am I to do it?"

"Use your woman's wit. Tell her—" he raised his hand impatiently to his forehead. "Plan it yourself, Mrs. Fraser; but mind, it must be done."

She looked hard at him.

"Is it heaven or hell that moves you, Owen Williams?"

"By heaven and hell, madam, I must see Mary Griffiths again, and I must see her alone. You hear me!"

He looked as if his judgment had reeled; as if the vice in which he held his passions so long and so fixedly had snapped under the strain.

"What I have to say to her," he continued, "matters nothing. I may beg her pardon, for anything you know about it."

She pressed her lips together. "Very well," she said, "I obey you. What shall I do with the child?"

"Bring him here."

"Now?"

"Yes."

In a few minutes she came back with Tony in her arms.

"We go together," said Williams.

"Together!"

"In my carriage. It's at the door."

She obeyed in silence. They all got in. The boy was white with fear, for whatever Owen's plans might be, he was desperate, and he looked so.

The road was practicable for carriages almost as far as the pass. There they stopped.

"Now do your errand," said Owen.

Mrs. Fraser said nothing. She got out, leaving Owen and the child in the carriage, and was soon lost among the precipices.

It happened that Mary and her father were in the field together before the shepherd's cottage, when Mrs. Fraser reached the valley. She saw them, and approached them:

"The child is found," she said.

Mary caught her arm.

"Found!"

"I stole him. I have brought him back. Owen Williams has taken him from me and is with him beyond the pass. He is desperate. He is a monster at this moment. He sends me to lure you to him; to tell you you will find the child; to bring you alone. He is resolved to see you. He means no good to you, but if you disappoint him he is wild enough to kill the child. I tell you all; I dare to betray him. Think quickly what is to be done."

Mary, helpless in her consternation, turned to her father with looks of despair. He was thoughtful for a moment. Then he asked where Williams and the child were waiting.

"Never fear," he said. "Go with her, Mary."

"Alone, father?"

"Nay, I'll be there before thee."

He went immediately, not by the pass, but along the mountain-side, telling Mary and Mrs. Fraser to make what speed they could till they

came in sight of the carriage. They did as he advised. A few hurried words on the way supplied the link that was wanting in Mary's knowledge of the plot against her. She heard how Mrs. Fraser herself had stolen her boy; how she had thrown his hat over the palings to mislead suspicion; how Betsy the nursemaid (notwithstanding her profession of ghostly fears) had played the eaves-dropper at the door when Anthony made his final accusation, and how Owen Williams was the instigator of it all. They were more than half-way up the pass, when, turning the corner of a huge mass of rock, to their surprise and horror they saw Williams himself, alone, coming towards them and at no great distance. They stopped in terror. "Run back!" Mrs. Fraser said, but Mary did not stir; she was in an agony of fear, not for herself, but for her boy and her father. Owen seemed to quicken his pace, but he was very lame.

Suddenly, Mary threw up her hands with a cry of joy, and calling to Mrs. Fraser to follow her, ran back as fast as she could. Stopping, at last, out

of breath, she turned for a moment; but the rocky buttress closed up the view and she saw no more either of Williams or Mrs. Fraser. But her father was coming down the mountain, and her child was on his shoulder. He leaped across the torrent —too wide a leap, too great an effort—but he came safe into the pass, and laid the boy in his mother's arms. Owen's impatience had facilitated the defeat of his last design. The shepherd, when he reached the carriage, found only Tony in it, and, overcoming the postilion's resistance, had borne him away in triumph up the mountain.

CHAPTER XXII.

CORONA BOREALIS.

The chronicle of the Borough Wall might end here, and indeed we have only a few parting words for those interested therein. Much of course was said by gossips when the whole story became known, and many morals were, wisely or unwisely, drawn from it by the sober-minded. Those who were free from any nervous dread of reproducing the thoughts of their ancestors, remarked that truth was stranger than fiction, and that the thing would not be believed if related in a novel. Some saw in the affair a lesson against unequal marriages; some, a warning against secrets in connubial matters; some against local politics; some against vanity; many, against over indulgence in jealous fears. A few, who had married

the first object of their boyish passion, saw in Anthony's troubles a retribution for the sin of second love, while one or two, comparing the results of Mary's unfailing trust with those of Anthony's judgment and suspicion, thought in their hearts, perhaps, that Faith like Love sees best where it is blindest; or, rather, that the highest vision is what the world calls blind. We leave each to his own inference. All truth is metaphor; all lives are lessons; what we learn from fact or fiction depends chiefly on ourselves.

No prosecutions were instituted, and nothing was heard for some considerable time of Owen Williams or Mrs. Fraser. It was reported afterwards that they went abroad together, and even that they ultimately married, but these pages are not responsible for the accuracy of any such accounts. The truth no doubt might be ascertained if it were worth the trouble, but there is little profit and no pleasure in tracing the career of guilty lives after they have ceased to have any influence upon innocent ones.

As to Mr. Fowkes, suspicion lighted upon him, and the gardener at the Bank having by circuitous processes succeeded in stealing one of his boots, had the further satisfaction of finding that it exactly fitted the marks made upon the borders. The charge against her husband being mentioned to Mrs. Fowkes, that lady bestowed several appropriate names upon him, but wished she might die if he had anything to do with it. He had everything to do with it, and die she did within a week afterwards, having set her clothes on fire by whisking herself round in a tantrum behind her italian-irons, and being found, with her head indeed in the wash-tub, but all the rest of her as black as a coal. Her husband vanished from the Four All's the day after, leaving the bailiffs in possession of his wife's laundry, and the coroner of her ashes, and was supposed either to have turned butler again or joined the more professional thieves.

As to Martin Dove, he was present when the marriage of Daniel Hobbes and Lucy was celebrated, and he remained in the church for some

hours after everybody else had left it, apparently expecting matters to begin again. Being warned by hunger that he had waited a long time, and seeing nothing but the empty pews round about him, he betook himself to the door. The door being locked upon him, Mr. Dove looked at the windows, and perceiving their height above the ground, he constructed a flight of steps with bibles at the bottom and cushions above; a piece of architecture which, being observed next morning, occasioned a cry of sacrilege and a search after the safety of the communion plate. From this time Martin took to reading with twice as much devotion as before. He was to be seen most frequently with Pilgrim's Progress in his hand; a book apparently more to his mind than any other; only when he got to the first view of the Delectable Mountains he stopped, and began again. Feeling a desire for foreign travel, he procured all the information that was to be got concerning the piece of land in America which Lucy Hathorne's father had transferred to Mr. Hobbes, and taking ship for the States, announced by letter his intention of finding

and securing it, if possible, for its rightful owner. It was said he had succeeded; that plans and certificates concerning this property were in his pocket and that he was on the point of returning home, when, going out one day to read by the Mississippi River, he sat down on a long dry log, which proved to be an alligator, and was seen no more.

But in the meantime Mary had found her boy again and her joy was full. The happiness of her after life, however, began in tears and the solemnity of an orphan's sorrow. Mrs. Griffiths died only a few hours after the child's return. She died indeed of joy, a happy death, which, from the nature of her malady, could in no case have been long delayed. Her husband closed her eyes; her daughter knelt beside her bed; she had blessed her grandchild; and, for his and Mary's sake, had forgiven his father. John Griffiths wept over her, but smiled also while he did so. He gave directions for her funeral and remembered every wish she had ever expressed, and fulfilled them all. The grave was

dug in the little churchyard and all the village came to see it. John followed his wife's coffin very peacefully. He stayed a good while by the grave, and all the next night he spent upon the hills, coming home at daybreak only, as he had done on the days before their betrothal. He talked cheerfully of life and death; of peace and blessedness; of the twinkling Pleiades, the Corona Borealis, and all his favorite stars. He gave Mary some flowers from the mountain, and Anthony some spar from one of the precipices, and a little motherless lamb to Tony, which the child promised to care for and for which he kissed his grandfather's grey hair. Towards evening he went to bed, and sent for his daughter and her husband. He shook Anthony's hand in silence. He took Mary's in his own, and held it a little while and put it to his lips, and said, looking in her face,— "My Mary!" Then he turned a little from her and clasped his hands; fixed his gaze on the far distance, and said again, in a low murmur and for other ears, "My Mary!"

In the sky that night the Corona Borealis rose high above the valley, and the lost Pleiades set behind the sun. The valley was the Shadow of Death; the sky was Paradise; the shepherd's eyes were hidden, and their watch ended; but God had wiped away their tears.

THE END.

London: Printed by Smith, Elder and Co., Little Green Arbour Court, E.C.